

'SCHOOL STRESS IN CHILDREN'

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my Mum and Dad
with love

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ABSTRACT

Most of us can empathise with feeling stressed. Each of us has our own unique interpretation of what stress is and our own understanding of what stress feels like. We each feel stress from a variety of sources and for a variety of reasons. We all have different coping strategies, which may or may not be effective. It is likely we learned our coping strategies in childhood; children who cope successfully with stress are likely to become adults who cope with stress successfully. Stress is not necessarily a 'bad thing': it can have many positive benefits. But too much stress, or coping ineffectively with repeated stress over long periods of time can have harmful effects on physical and psychological well being.

This research investigates stress in school children, focusing specifically on school stress and everyday stressors inherent in schooling. It lets the pupils taking part in the research define their own stress and set the agenda for the research. How the pupils define their stress, their assessment of what is stressful for them in their life at school and how it makes them feel are all accepted unconditionally, and I have endeavoured to be non-judgemental in processing the information about stress disclosed to me by these pupils.

The research was conducted over a two year period (1993-1994), at the eleven to sixteen comprehensive school where the author is employed. The data were collected by means of questionnaire, semi-structured interview and pupils' own personal writing and 'stress diaries'.

After piloting, the first questionnaire was issued in January 1993 to one hundred and eighty volunteers in every form and every year group in the school (six questionnaires to each of the thirty tutor groups in the school). Of these questionnaires, 167 were returned

(92.8%). The questionnaire asked respondents who would be prepared to be interviewed at a later stage, to identify themselves. Forty-five pupils volunteered.

From these volunteers I selected pupils who had indicated that they had experienced feeling stress at school at some time on their questionnaire. I tried to keep a balance between males and females wherever possible, and to choose volunteers from across the age range. There were ten male and eleven female interviewees in the final selection: one male and one female from year seven; one male and two females from year eight; two males and two females from year nine; and three males and three females from years ten and eleven respectively.

The process was repeated again in 1994. Of the one hundred and eighty questionnaires issued in 1994, one hundred and forty three were returned (79%). Possible explanations for the difference in the number of questionnaires returned are discussed in Chapter 6. The same volunteers were interviewed in 1994 as in 1993, with the addition of two new volunteers, one male and one female, from year seven.

The questionnaires and interviews were issued and conducted during the same time periods in both years. This was deliberately done to maintain consistency, to confirm the data collected in 1993 and to highlight any periods during the school year when pupils reported feeling more stress than at other times. This was successful as much of the data collected in 1994 does confirm the findings of 1993, and helps to build up a remarkably consistent picture of how pupils perceive stress at school. Originally, the author had planned to repeat the research method for a third year, but it was felt unnecessary to do this due to the corroborative nature of the data already collected. I have presented the results of each year separately rather than amalgamated the two sets of data, not only to emphasise this correlation but also because I wished to present as detailed a picture as possible of the

stressful aspects of school life as perceived by the pupils, and although much of it is similar, none of it is the same. Each pupil has offered their own unique interpretation of the stressful school experiences he/she has encountered, and I felt it was important to include them all as equally important and valid in order to preserve the aims and integrity of the research. It would be impossible to amalgamate the data without trivialising the disparity of the experiences being disclosed to me.

The main findings of this research suggest that there is a diverse, but ultimately exhaustive, range of school experiences pupils describe as being stressful for them. Most of these experiences can be categorised into domains relating to stressors which are curriculum generated; stressors which are the result of conflict in relationships with peers, teachers and/or family members; everyday life stressors not necessarily associated directly with school and a range of individually unique 'one off' stressors.

By far the most prominent domain of stress for the pupils taking part in this research was the curriculum generated category. Specific items perceived as stressful within this category were: exams and tests; coursework deadlines; too much homework/coursework; unequal distribution of work load leading to overload at some times and underload at others, and not understanding the work set.

The amount of stress the pupils reported feeling in relation to curriculum generated stressors increased steadily throughout their school life reaching predictable, but significantly, high levels by years ten and eleven.

Pupils' affective response to this stress was manifested mainly in feelings of anxiety, anger and sadness which again increased progressively through their school career, peaking in year 11. Reported physical manifestations included: feeling tired, run down or weak; suffering headaches, stomach ache and sickness, loss of sleep or appetite, and exacerbation

of allergies and asthma.

The data to suggest that school life is stressful for a significant proportion of the pupils participating in this research is considerable, and I felt that the research should provide a springboard for change in the school where the research has been conducted. I have offered some suggestions for improving school life for pupils and ways in which the school can take stress on board as a whole school issue in terms of the school's policies, its development plan, the curriculum and classroom practice. I suggest that many of the initiatives discussed would be possible and desirable in other schools and that there are implications for future teacher training.

INTRODUCTION

Stress is often popularly referred to as the 'fight or flight' response. This idea is inherited from our ancestors: living in a difficult and often hostile environment, surviving by hunting and foraging for food and having to cope with the ever-present threat of attack by wild animals. Their bodies were equipped with the 'fight or flight' response which prepared them for instant action in life-endangering situations: either fighting for their lives or running away.

Although obviously today we do not face the same sort of dangers as our ancestors, the 'fight or flight' response of our bodies still exists. It is a sequence of biological processes which were first identified by Dr. Hans Selye and used to describe 'physiological stress'.

In the 1930's Dr. Selye was engaged in research on the hormonal functions of rats at the McGill University in Canada. Part of this research required him to inject the rats with a variety of substances of varying degrees of toxicity. When they died, Selye would dissect the animals to ascertain the effects of the substances on their internal organs. He discovered a pattern of change which was broadly similar despite the substance the rats had been injected with; their bodies seemed to have a standard response to unpleasant stimuli.

Selye called the stereotyped response the 'general adaption syndrome' or GAS and distinguished three stages: 'alarm reaction'; 'stage of resistance' and the 'stage of exhaustion'.

The 'alarm reaction' had been identified earlier by Walter Cannon as the 'emergency reaction', but in a more extreme form. In the most acute circumstances the 'emergency reaction' equates to the 'fight or flight' response in ensuring the survival of the organism.

This 'alarm reaction' is triggered in humans by what Selye called a 'stressor', and is

partially recognisable to us in all the situations where we experience fear or maybe great excitement. The alarm reaction sets off a complicated series of physiological and chemical changes in the body which are outlined here in a simplified form.

When the brain first receives the stimuli of danger, from the eyes or ears for example, the hypothalamus of the brain activates the pituitary gland to secrete a hormone called adrenocorticotrophic hormone, or ACTH, to activate the adrenal glands. The adrenal glands release the hormones adrenalin, nor-adrenalin and cortisone. The involuntary nervous system is also activated and signals sent to various parts of the body via 'nerve pathways'. In general terms this leads to the following bodily changes: the breathing increases and can become shallower, air passages in the lungs open wider to allow air to pass more quickly; the heartbeat increases and the blood pressure rises; the liver releases sugar, cholesterol and fatty acids into the blood to supply energy to the muscles; sweating increases to help cool the body; blood clotting ability increases, preparing for possible injury; the muscles of the bladder and bowel openings contract and non-life saving functions of the body systems cease temporarily; blood is delivered to the muscles and muscle fibres tense ready for action.

This is the standard response of the 'alarm reaction' and it puts an enormous strain on the body's resources, but it cannot be avoided entirely. In the short term this response can be life saving but in the long term it can damage health. After the 'alarm reaction' the body will 'return to normal', but if the stressor remains it will be followed by the 'stage of resistance' when the body will remain mobilized and will 'fight' the stressor. Continued resistance leads to 'exhaustion' when the body's resources are depleted and it becomes vulnerable to stress-related diseases.

Some of the more serious stress-related diseases are the consequences of repeated

'alarm reactions' exacerbated by 'exhaustion'. For example, in the 'alarm reaction' the stomach releases hydrochloric acid which is essential for the digestion of food. If this acid is released into an empty stomach it can cause damage to the lining of the stomach, the oesophagus and the upper intestines. Over a period of time this can lead to the development of ulcers. Similarly, continued mobilization of the cardio-vascular system can lead to cardio-vascular disease and heart attacks in the long term.

Other physical disease associated with the long term effects of stress include: headaches, dizziness, blurred vision, hyperventilation, asthma, palpitations, high blood pressure, excessive sweating, high blood sugar, nervous indigestion, disturbed sleep patterns, difficulty in swallowing, neck and back problems, bowel disorders, rashes and allergies.

Although, as Selye said, we cannot avoid stress in our lives or control the response it has in our bodies, Selye believed we could learn to use it more effectively. Selye states

'We can learn to make this valuable resource last long, by using it wisely and sparingly, only for things that are worthwhile and cause least distress.'

(Selye 1974 page 40).

However, it is a finite resource, and it will eventually 'wear out'.

Selye described the GAS as 'non-specific' meaning that no one specific cause can be attributed to it. The stressor which triggers the 'alarm reaction' and the length of time it lasts are both psychologically linked. Humans vary enormously in what they perceive as being stressful. Stressors can be external, internal or a combination of both. In Selye's account of physiological stress, the 'alarm reaction' is dependent on the process of cognition. A stressor only becomes a stressor when an individual identifies it as one. The status of the stressor

and the 'alarm reaction' are maintained for as long as the individual concerned continues to identify it as a stressor. When the stressor loses this status, the 'alarm reaction' ceases.

Since Selye's pioneering research in the 1930's into physiological stress, there has been a tremendous interest in all aspects of stress research - physiological, psychological, and social - which has yielded no consensus on what stress actually is.

I would like to introduce my research, (and my own ideas on what stress 'is'), with a discussion, which inevitably refers again to the work of Dr. Selye, on the problems seemingly inherent in trying to define 'the nature of stress'. The first chapter will also review some of the literature attempting to define stress and various stress models. The review is by no means exhaustive; I have had to be selective owing to the wealth of literature available on this subject.

Following this chapter I will discuss the nature of school stress and consider some of the external environmental and social conditions which potentially, and maybe indirectly, influence the stress pupils feel at school.

In chapter 3 I will describe the background to my own research and discuss the complicated methodological issues surrounding stress research.

In chapters 4 and 5 I will describe and analyse the data collected through questionnaires and interviews during 1993. The next two chapters will follow a similar structure analysing data collected during 1994.

In the final chapter I will consider the implications of this research for the school and its pupils. This research aims to influence change, where change is possible, in the policies and practices of the school which govern everyday life for its pupils and sometimes create stressful situations for them. The research sets out to discover what these stressful situations are and how they make pupils feel; it then moves on to look at what the school

can do to improve these situations to make everyday school life less stressful for its pupils.

It is therefore hoped that the research will be productive and used as a catalyst for change.

CHAPTER ONE

STRESS: THE ELUSIVE CONCEPT

'The single most remarkable historical fact concerning the term 'stress' is its persistent, widespread usage in biology and medicine in spite of almost chaotic disagreement over its definition.'

(Mason in Garnezy and Rutter 1988 page 1).

I chose this quotation as a starting point to my discussion of the nature of stress because perhaps the most strikingly consistent feature in the vastness of literature to be found on the subject, is the uniform uncertainty surrounding a precise definition of its meaning. Mason's choice of the adjective 'chaotic' gives this uncertainty the precision the definition itself lacks.

Salient to the elusiveness of a definition for stress is its common usage by academics and professionals from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds, for example psychology, psychiatry, sociology and anthropology (not only the biologists and medics mentioned by Mason), and laymen alike, at different times and in differing contexts. However, despite this lack of consistency or maybe even because of it, it is a word which is understood by all, albeit in vague and general terms.

As stress means different things to different people at different times, there are many confusing and seemingly contradictory attempts at its definition (Selye 1974). There are strategies to these definitions: one is to define the concept so rigidly it becomes exclusive and 'rules out' other important and connected concepts and areas of research; another strategy defers to vagary or even abandons the concept and definition (McGrath 1970). Another strategy suggested by Cox is not to attempt a definition but to refer to 'models' or

'approaches' to the 'stress concept' as a single definition can only have heuristic value at the present time (Cox 1978). A further strategy pursued by McGrath is to forget the question 'what is stress?' and ask the question 'what is stress research?'. In his own words:

'We shift from an attempt to determine what the phenomenon of stress is to a consideration of what kinds of phenomena have been referred to and investigated under this label and how those phenomena are related to one another.'

(McGrath 1970 page 11).

Traditionally, the literature describes three different but overlapping approaches to, or models of, the stress concept (Cox 1995): the stimulus-based model; the response-based model and the transactional model. A common theme running through these models of stress is the relationship between the individual and his/her environment with the environment as either the 'source' (not necessarily the sole source) or 'cause' of the stress and the individual as the 'target' or 'locus of effects' (Karasek and Theorell 1990). However, transactional models of stress recognise the mediating role of the individual, and take on the notion of 'personal meanings' (Fisher 1988) and therefore place greater emphasis on the interaction between the individual and his/her environment than Karasek and Theorell have suggested.

Briefly, the stimulus-based approach considers stress as an objective characteristic of the environment which affects the individual's perceptual and cognitive processes. These characteristics are independently verifiable and not dependent on the individual's consciousness or experience (Pratt and Barling 1988). Stress is seen as a stimulus; events or circumstances which are determined stressful are referred to as stressors. The response-based approach considers stress as a dependent variable and focuses on stress as the individual's subjective response or reaction to stressors; this reaction is sometimes referred

to as 'strain'. The transactional approach focuses on stress more as a process which involves stressors and strains, and is influenced by the individual's continuous interaction with his or her environment (Sarafino 1994).

THE STIMULUS-BASED MODEL

Stress as the independent variable

The stimulus-based model is also often referred to as the 'engineering model' of stress (Cox 1978, Hinkle 1974, Sutherland and Cooper 1990). This analogy has its roots in the later part of the Seventeenth Century when Robert Hooke formulated his Law of Elasticity. The Law describes the effect of external force on the distortion of an elastic body (Engel 1985). Stress is the application of the external force to the substance, also referred to as 'load' or 'demand', which results in 'strain' or deformity to the substance to which the force is being applied (McGrath 1970). All substances have a tolerance level; if the stress is within the 'elastic limits' of the substance it will return to its original form when the stress is removed. If this tolerance level is exceeded then temporary or permanent damage ensues (Cox 1978, Sutherland and Cooper 1990). The main principle of the law states:

'That if the strain produced by a given stress falls within the 'elastic limit' of the material, when the stress is removed the material will simply return to its original condition. If, however, the strain passes beyond the elastic limit then some permanent change will result.'

(Cox 1978 page 13).

Cooper and Sutherland (1990) liken the stimulus-based model of stress to the adage 'it is the straw that breaks the camel's back'. The individual can only tolerate a certain

*S = stimulus
*R = response

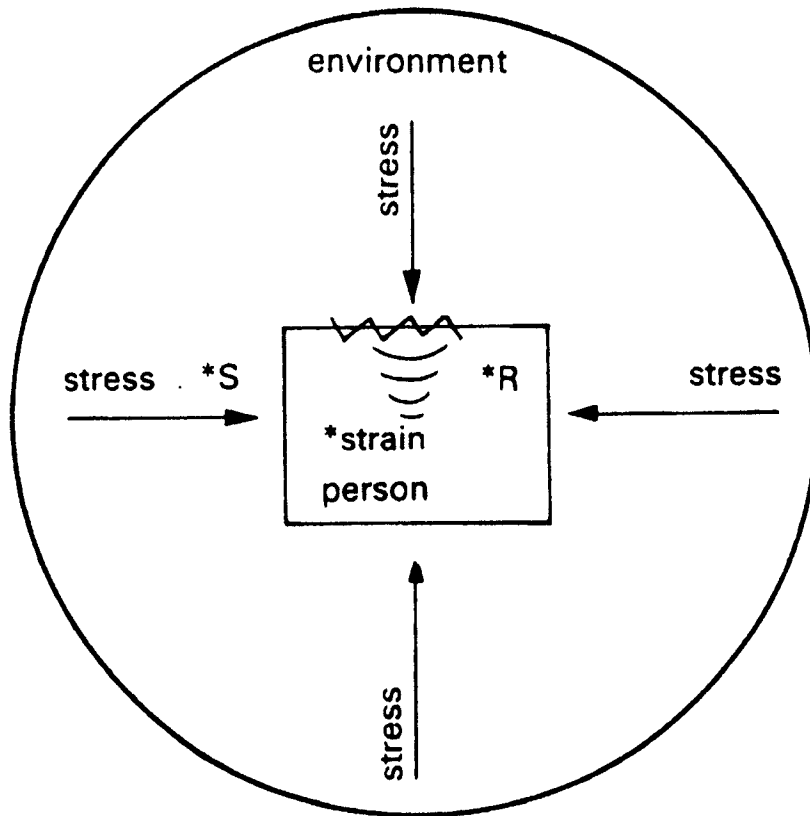


Figure 1 The Stimulus-Based Model of Stress

amount of potential stressors from the environment; once this limit is reached, one more seemingly minor event may be all it takes to cause the individual to no longer cope effectively which leads to a deterioration in functioning, which is the reaction to stress (Derogatis and Coons 1993). This model of stress is represented in Figure 1 (Reproduced from Sutherland and Cooper 1990 page 16).

In human terms the engineering analogy implies that people also have an inherent resistance to stress and are able to tolerate certain amounts of stress; however if the stress level becomes intolerable damage may result. The stress is seen as a condition of the environment: social, physical or psychological which 'impinges' on the individual (Meichenbaum 1983). These conditions or 'stressors' are generally described as being negative environmental factors or 'aversive or noxious' elements of a given environment (Cox 1995).

Problems with this application of Hooke's Law to humans arise in defining what constitutes a stressful environment. The stimulus-based approach is objective and ignores the differences in individual perceptions. There is great individual variation to the interpretation of a stressful environment just as there are vast differences in resistance to one. We cannot assume that what is considered stressful for one person will also be stressful for another. Lazarus has suggested that no situation can be described as stressful objectively, only the individual experiencing it can do this (Lazarus 1966). One attempt to overcome this problem is to define stress in terms of the levels of stimulation experienced by individuals, and see stress 'as an intense level of everyday life'. However, this does not recognise the 'absence of stimulation' as being stressful (Fisher 1986). Indeed the 'engineering model' in general does not take into account in human terms, the absence of stimulation. It 'assumes that an undemanding situation is not stressful and is a prescription for maximum well-being', and that people and machines behave in a comparative way (Cox 1978).

The stimulus-based model of stress has been challenged by more contemporary models, but has been used in 'life event' theory into human stress responses to catastrophic natural disasters, for example: earthquakes, floods and fires; 'life event' stress which affects

almost all individuals at some point during their lives, for example: bereavement, retirement and marriage; and more recently, environmental and occupational stress. Some theorists, for example Elliot and Eisdorfer (1982) distinguish between these different classes of stressor and their responding ability to induce stress. The main categories the stressors are put into are: acute, time-limited stressors, for example: immediate situations of threat or fear, natural disasters at one end of the scale personal attack at the other; stressor sequences; chronic intermittent stressors and chronic stressors all of which can be related to 'life events'.

The first human 'life event' stress research was conducted during the Second World War by Grinker and Spiegel (1945) and explored soldiers' reactions to battlefield trauma (Karasek and Theorell 1990). In 1947, Charles Symonds stated the views of the Royal Air Force Medical Service on flying stress as 'stress is that which happens to the man, not that which happens in him; it is a set of causes not a set of symptoms' (Symonds in Cox 1995), clearly emphasising stress as the stimulus. Stress was conceptualised 'as an insulting agent, generally external to the organism, to which the organism responds' (Sells 1970). This theory was developed during the early 1960's to consider major stressors in the lives of individuals, mainly in relation to their health.

In 1964, Holmes and Rahe developed the Social Readjustment Rating Questionnaire (SRRQ) to gather numerical ratings for the degree of life change and readjustment experienced by individuals. This was subsequently revised to produce the Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS), an extensive checklist of possible life event stressors. The list contained 42 life events which ranged in severity, for example 'marriage', 'birth of a child', 'divorce' and 'death of a spouse', and which seemed to cluster in the six to twelve months preceding the onset of illness in the 5000 patients examined. Originally, a simple

scoring method was used which was supposed to reflect the level of stress being experienced by the individual completing the checklist. Later, this method was replaced and a weighting system was introduced to differentiate the severity of the life events (Ogden 1996). Physically well individuals were asked to rate the stressful nature of the life events relative to marriage, which was given a base score of 500. Each item on SRRS was then assigned a weighting based on these scores. The resulting score was calculated in terms of 'life change units' which were used to compare individuals who were ill and to predict the likelihood of illness prospectively, or link the life events with illness retrospectively (Fisher 1988). Some studies have shown a small correlation between high scores on the SRRS (scores of over 300 life change units) and susceptibility to physical and mental illness for example: Eron and Peterson (1982) and Holmes and Masude (1974). However, it is unclear as to whether life events trigger illness or whether some life events are themselves signs of developing illness, for example a change in eating or sleeping habits or being fired from work (Gross 1987). Dohrenwend, Raphael, Schwartz, Stueve and Skodol (1993) refer to the problem of 'intracategory variability' when considering life events checklists and the prediction of health outcomes. They believe that these correlations are low due to the measurement error inherent in checklists derived from the variability in individual ratings of the magnitude of events.

The Holmes and Rahe SRRS is objective as the importance of events is measured in terms of how much change and readjustment the event was likely to cause the individual; viewing the event as the significant factor and therefore the stimulus. Other scales and checklists with similar methods of measurement were subsequently developed for example, Coddington (1972) modified the SRRS to measure stressful life events in childhood. As interest in life events research increased the initial stimulus base approach was adjusted to

include the significance of 'personal meaning' to events which were no longer considered to be the sole variable. More emphasis was given to the individual than to the environment and stressful life events were considered to be 'person-environment transactions' (Dohrenwend, Raphael, Schwartz, Stueve and Skodol 1993).

The Holmes and Rahe SRRS and other similar scales and checklists, like the stimulus-based model itself, do not take into account individual differences in psychology, cognitive and perceptual processes. It assumes all the events on the SRRS are stressful for everyone and that the same amount of stress is experienced by individuals; it is retrospective and does not accommodate change over time; it ignores a possible interaction between the life events listed, assuming the effects to be accumulative whereas in reality one supposedly stressful event might balance out another, for example, 'divorce' and 'trouble with in-laws'.

The stimulus-based approach was also used in early research into stress at work; stimulus-based models identified aspects of the work environment as potential sources of stress. In recent years there has been a growth of interest in occupational stress and accompanying research into it from the perspective of the individual, the organisation and society; the main concerns being the cost of stress to industrial productivity and to individual health. Much of the earlier research grew from rapid industrialisation which brought with it problematic physical working conditions: space, heat and noise for example, which had harmful effects on workers' health. Stress was associated with a physical aspect of the working environment which created unpleasant conditions for the workforce. However, as physical conditions have improved due to health and safety legislation 'contemporary industrialization and new technology bring different problems' (Sutherland and Cooper 1990). For example, Cooper and Marshall (1976) identified work overload,

role conflict or ambiguity and poor working conditions as important aspects of potential occupational stress. The worker's experience of stress is here no longer viewed in isolation and organizational features and personal differences are acknowledged as mediating factors.

Cooper and Marshall conceptualise stress at work in terms of an interaction between the potential sources of stress in the working environment, the characteristics of the individual involved, (this interaction has been labelled by Lofquist and Dawis (1969) as the person-environment fit) and potential sources of stress which are 'outside' the working environment for example: problematic personal relationships or financial concerns (Cooper and Marshall 1976). French, Caplan and van Harrison (1982), focusing on the work environment, identified two basic components to the theory of person-environment fit. Firstly, the degree to which the motives of the individual, and the 'preferences' and 'goals' induced by those motives, are satisfied by the job and environment. Secondly, the ability of the individual to meet the demands of the job. Lack of fit in either or in both components, is likely to result in stress. This stress can be viewed in one of two ways: as either needs-supplies misfit or abilities-demands misfit which need not necessarily be mutually exclusive (Caplan 1983). Person-environment fit theory is based on the supposition that individuals vary in their needs and abilities just as jobs differ in their incentives and demands. Person-environment fit theory suggests that where lack of fit is experienced, the individual is likely to suffer harm to well-being (French, Caplan and Harrison 1982).

Although the person-environment fit theory described here is related to work stress, it is also applicable to stress generally and has much in common with transactional stress models which highlights the overlapping nature of the traditional stress models. It serves to move the discussion on from consideration of stimulus-based models of stress, which can be criticised for being too dated and simplistic because they fail to take into account the

personal meanings of the events and situations of the individual experiencing them. As I have already suggested more recent theories do account for individual differences in perceptual and cognition processes, but before a consideration of these I would like to discuss the models of stress which view stress as the response.

THE RESPONSE-BASED MODEL

Stress as the dependent variable

The response-based model of stress may also be referred to as the 'physiological' or 'medicophysiological' model of stress (Cox 1975, 1995). It focuses on the individual's responses and reactions to 'disturbing stimuli' and has two main components: physiological/biological responses and psychological/affective responses. As this model is strongly influenced by medical science, initially more attention was given to the physiological aspects of the stress response, than with the psychological aspects. More contemporary conceptualisation of the response-based model of stress considers both physiological, neurobiological and psychological responses and their effects on individual health and behaviour. The response-based model is represented in Figure 2. (Sutherland and Cooper 1990 page 11).

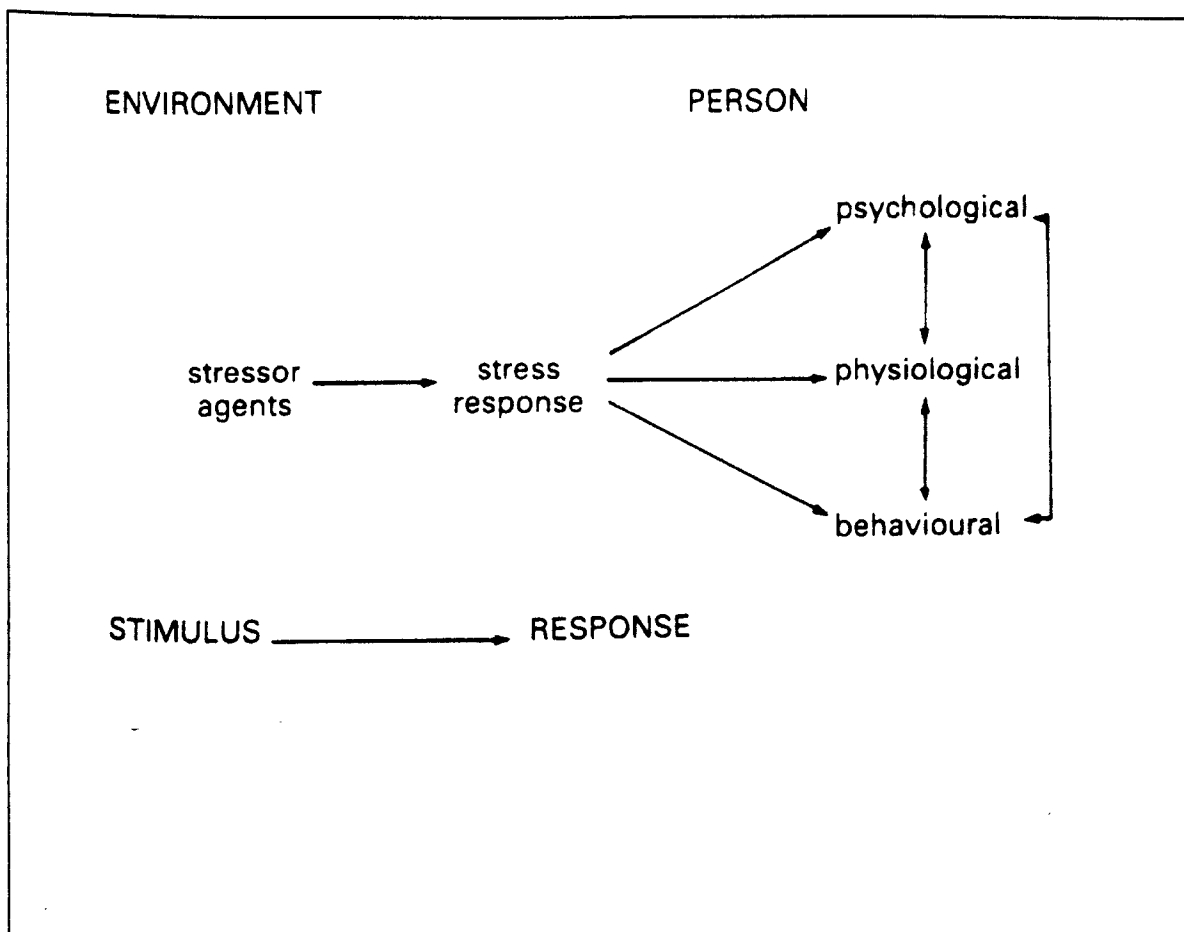


Figure 2 The Response-Based Model of Stress

This model of stress owes much to the work of Hans Selye who suggested that although individuals vary in the situations or events they consider to be stressors, biologically they respond in a 'stereotyped manner' (Selye 1974). However, the origins of the concept go back to the second half of the Nineteenth Century. The French physiologist, Claude Bernard, suggested that the 'internal environment' of any living organism must remain fixed despite its external environment: 'it is a fixity of the 'milieu interieur' which is the condition of free and independent life' (Selye 1974). This gave rise to the term 'homeostatis' from the Greek 'homoios' meaning similar, and 'statis' meaning position, which was used fifty years later by Walter Cannon to refer to the 'co-ordinated physiological processes which maintain most of the steady states in the organism' (Selye 1974). Canon, who investigated how an organism responds in extreme physical environments, developed

the popular 'fight or flight' model of stress which describes physiological changes, associated with increased activity rate and arousal, which occur when an individual feels threatened. The response prepares the individual to either escape from the source of stress or fight, and is inherited from our ancestors who literally had to 'fight' or resort to 'flight' in order to survive the dangers inherent in their lives.

In 1926 Hans Selye, noted that situations which threatened homeostasis had common signs and symptoms, or what he termed as a medical student 'the symptoms of being sick'. He observed patients suffering a diversity of illnesses and noted similarities in their symptoms for example: 'loss of weight and appetite, diminished muscular strength, and absence of ambition' (Selye in Goldberger and Breznitz 1993). Laboratory experiments gave rise to Selye's 'General Adaption Syndrome' or GAS in 1936. Selye believed that the physiological stress response was a non-specific defence reaction, independent of the stressor and common to all species. He also believed that the General Adaption Syndrome progresses through three stages which can be identified as: the alarm reaction, the stage of resistance and the stage of exhaustion.

The alarm reaction occurs immediately the individual is exposed to a stressful situation; it constitutes the initial psycho-physiological response and the body shows signs of change and the individual's resistance is lowered. (Cannon's 'fight or flight' response (1932)). The body cannot maintain the stage of alarm; if the stressor is sufficiently severe and incompatible with adaption, it will die. Selye suggests that this will be within the first few hours or days (Selye 1980). Sutherland and Cooper describe the body's response at the alarm stage:

'Increased sympathetic activity results in the secretion of catecholamine, which prepare the body physiologically for action; for example, heart rate and blood pressure increase, the spleen contracts, blood supplies are redirected from the skin and viscera to provide an improved blood supply to the brain and skeletal muscle. Glucose stored as glycogen in the liver is released to provide energy for muscular action, the blood coagulation process is enhanced and the supply of blood lymphocytes increased to combat potential injury and infection.'

(Sutherland and Cooper 1990 page 14).

If the individual survives this initial reaction, the stage of resistance follows. Selye believed this stage to be 'quite different' and in many ways 'opposite' to the characteristics of the alarm reaction. Selye states:

'... during the alarm reaction, the cells of the adrenal cortex discharge their secretory granules into the bloodstream and thus become depleted of corticoid-containing lipid storage material; in the stage of resistance, on the other hand, the cortex becomes particularly rich in secretory granules. In the alarm reaction, there is hemoconcentration, hypochloremia, and general tissue catabolism, whereas in the stage of resistance there is hemodilution, hyperchloremia, and anabolism, with a return to normal body weight.'

(Selye in Goldberger and Breznitz 1993 page 10).

These changes mark a period of adaption to the situation. However, the individual's adaptability is finite and with continual and prolonged exposure it can 'wear out' and the stage of exhaustion is reached, when literally, the individual dies. Selye likens the whole process to life itself where childhood represents the alarm stage characterised by low resistance and excessive response to stimulus; adulthood responds to adaption and increased resistance and old age to loss of adaption, exhaustion and eventual death (Selye in Goldberger and Breznitz 1993). As stress is synonymous with life, it cannot be avoided and it is not inevitably negative. A certain amount of stress can be considered good for the individual and has been termed 'eustress'. Unfortunately, Selye did not distinguish the level at which stress changes from being good to harmful (Karasek and Theorell 1990). He did

claim we could learn to adapt more efficiently but gave no evidence to suggest that we can add to our reserves of adaptability (Selye 1956). Selye's General Adaption Syndrome is represented in Figure 3. (Reproduced from Cox 1978 page 6).

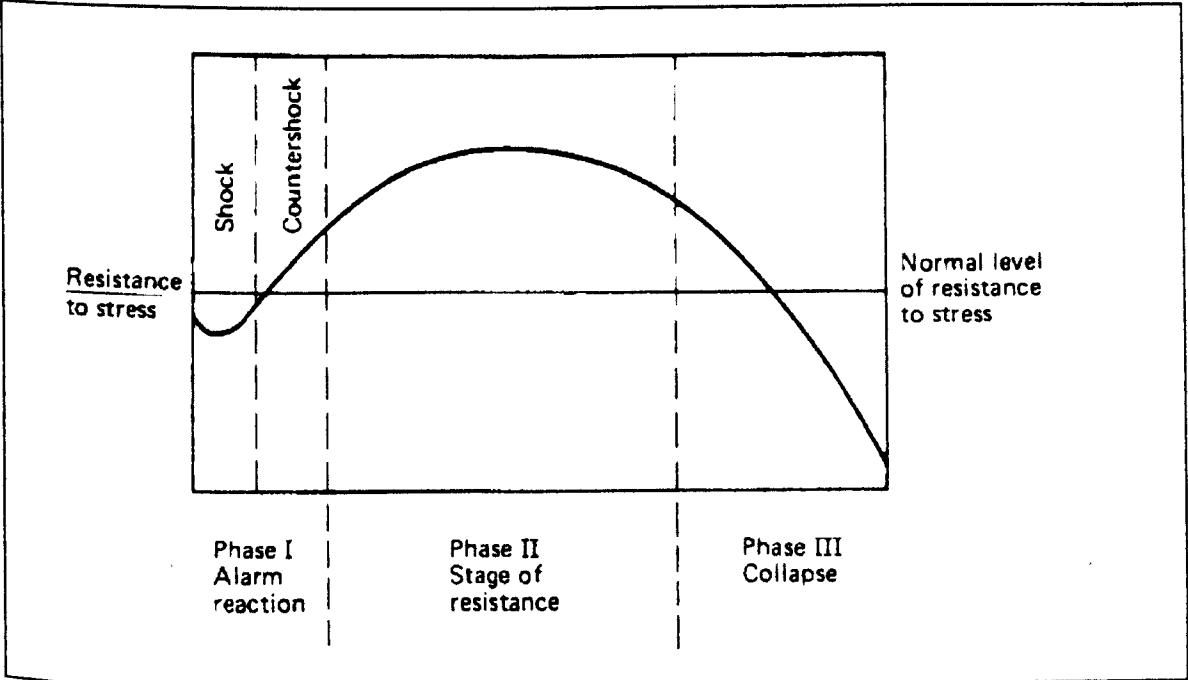


Figure 3 Selye's General Adaption Syndrome

Although Selye's physiological response based theory of stress, and particularly the idea of non-specificity, has been influential in increasing understanding of stress related illness it has been challenged. There is evidence to suggest that not all responses follow the same pattern as Selye suggested, and that they are stimulus specific and identifiable through hormone secretion. For example, adrenaline is associated with anxiety and noradrenaline with aggression (Sutherland and Cooper 1990). Also, Mason (1971) noted that exercise, fasting and heat as adverse stimuli do not produce the GAS in its entirety. Lacey (1967) is also cautious of claims for an identifiable response syndrome due to the low correlation of the physiological indices which have been included in Selye's GAS (McGrath1970).

McGrath (1970) identifies three weaknesses in response-based models of stress. Firstly, all situations which produce the stress response must be considered as stressors

even when the term might not be appropriately applied for example: passion, exercise and surprise. Secondly, the same response pattern may arise from different situations for example: blood pressure and heart rate will both increase through exercise or in the presence of threat and thirdly, all the symptoms suggested by Selye do not always appear together.

A criticism of Selye's response-based model is that in placing emphasis on the body's physiological response to stressors, he ignored the psychological processes involved (Cox 1978), or if not ignored, placed the psychological component to stress in a secondary and less important place in the total concept of human stress (Morgan 1986). Cox suggests that 'much of the physiological response is not directly determined by the actual presence of the stressor agent but by its psychological impact on the person' (Cox 1978). Kegan and Levi (1971) developed Selye's model to include a psychological dimension. While agreeing with the general framework of Selye's model, that stress provokes a physiological response which prepares the individual for the physical coping response, they incorporate the idea of an interaction between external stimuli (psychosocial stimuli) and the genetic characteristics (psychobiological make-up) of the individual. Stress is still viewed as the response, but it is to the interaction between the individual's psychobiological make-up and the psychosocial stimulus. The significance of this model is that it moves the response-based definition forward to more contemporary interactional and transactional models of stress, viewing stress more as a process rather than simply a physiological/psychological response.

A further criticism of the response-based model of stress, and indeed the stimulus-based model, is that they both treat the individual as passive, viewing stress as something which is either external or internal to the individual. The individual is an important variable in considering stress and accounts for the vast differences in what are considered stress

stimuli and stress responses.

It is the idea of stress being equated with the stimulus and the response, psychological, physiological and behavioural, which gives rise to the transactional model of stress. Transactional theories emphasise the importance of the individual's characteristics in mediating between the aspects of their environment and the responses evoked. As Derogatis and Coons (1993) state:

'not only does the individual mediate the impact of environmental stimulus upon responses, but, in addition, the perceptual, cognitive, and physiological characteristics of the individual affect and become a significant component of the environment.'

(Derogatis and Coons in Goldberger and Breznitz 1993 page 203).

THE TRANSACTIONAL MODEL

The transactional model of stress recognises the importance of the interaction between the individual and the environment in determining whether stress is likely to occur and has evolved from the stimulus and response models. 'In short, stress resides neither in the situation nor in the person, but depends on the transaction of the individual in the situation' (Meichenbaum 1983). Dewe, Cox and Ferguson (1996) maintain transactional definitions of stress have three important components:

- ▶ Stress is a dynamic cognitive state
- ▶ representing a disruption in homeostatis or 'imbalance'
- ▶ giving rise to a requirement for resolution of that imbalance or restoration of homeostatis.

The idea has been argued from a number of different perspectives; Selye suggested that stress is ever present making continual demands on the individual. The demand may be internal or external, but it is the individual's perception of the demand which is significant. The perception may be of threat from the environment (Scott and Howard 1970), or of endangerment of well-being (Cofer and Appley 1964) for example, but if there is an imbalance between this perceived demand and the individual's perceived ability to cope with it, then stress will occur. 'Demand' is defined by Cox as 'a request or requirement for physical or mental action, and implies some time constraint' (Cox 1978) and coping is defined by Lazarus (1974) as 'problem solving efforts made by an individual when the demands he faces are highly relevant to his welfare and where these demands tax his adaptive resources' (Murgatroyd 1982). The perceived significance of the demand and the perceived importance of coping successfully may also affect the level of stress likely to be experienced by the individual. However, not all interpretations of the transactional model qualify individual perception. Mechanic (1962) for example, emphasises a 'focus on the objective discrepancy between demands and ability rather than the individual's perception of the discrepancy' (Kyriacou and Sutcliffe 1978).

There are two important variables to consider in the dynamic relationship between the individual and his/her environment which determines much of the concept of stress as transactional: firstly, individuals vary immensely in what they perceive as stressful; secondly, in appraising the perceived stress, individuals may inadvertently contribute to their own stress. This paradox is also recognised by Selye which illustrates the eclectic nature of this model of stress. In his discussion of his 'General Adaption Syndrome' he states 'one's own individual response to stress may also become a source of stress' (Selye 1956).

The cognitive appraisal process is fundamental to the transactional model of stress. The appraisal process assesses four major factors: the demand itself, the individual's coping resources; the constraints individuals are under when coping and the social support they are likely to receive (Sarafino 1994). In much simplified terms Lazarus sees it as a two-tier process involving primary and secondary appraisal. Primary appraisal judges the immediate situation or demand being made on the individual. These judgements may be made instantly, consciously or unconsciously, but are subject to a variety of individual factors such as personality, culture, values and beliefs. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) argue that the individual may be unaware of all components of an appraisal. Judgements may be made without the individual fully knowing all the reasons for his/her appraisal of the situation or event (Robson 1994). The individual may judge the situation or demand to be either threatening or non-threatening; having advantages or disadvantages; potentially harmful or safe, a challenge or a threat. When this judgement has been made secondary appraisal then begins. This involves the individual's perception of his/her ability to cope with the situation. This judgement again is subject to individual factors such as personality, previous experience, self-esteem and self-confidence. If this judgement is negative then stress may occur (Lazarus 1966; Folkman and Lazarus 1986)

A third aspect in the appraisal process is offered by Sells (1970). Tertiary appraisal considers the consequences of the individual's responses to these judgements. Stress occurs if the individual judges the consequences of not coping, or failure to cope, as important to his/her well-being. This process is clearly described by Sells:

'The state of stress arises under the following conditions:

- 1. The individual is called upon in a situation to respond to circumstances for which he has no adequate response available. The unavailability of an adequate response may be due to physical inadequacy; absence of the response in the individual's response repertoire; lack of training, equipment, or the opportunity to prepare.*
- 2. The consequences of failure to respond effectively are important to the individual. Personal involvement in situations can be defined in terms of importance of consequence to the individual.'*

(Sells in McGrath 1970 page 138).

It could be suggested that in this conceptualisation of the stress response that the response may be evoked even if the individual does have what he/she believes to be an 'adequate response' when the demand is first made. The individual may realise, at a later stage, that his/her initial response is inadequate and have no further strategies to try.

Appraising situations as stressful or otherwise depends on factors concerned with the individual and factors relating to the situation. Personal factors include intellectual, motivational and personality characteristics. For example Cohen and Lazarus (1983) suggest the significance of self-esteem; people with high self-esteem are more likely to have confidence in their coping strategies and see demands as challenges rather than threats. Paterson and Neufield (1987) cited motivation as a significant factor and Ellis (1987) noted the importance of people's belief systems. Situational factors which affect the appraisal process are to do with the severity of the demand itself, the imminence of the demand, the timing of the demand in relation to the individual involved, desirability, ambiguity and controllability (Sarafino 1994).

Recent theories of stress have emphasised the importance of self-control in the appraisal process. For example: Lazarus and Folkman (1987) suggest that self-efficacy, which refers to the individual's feeling of confidence in his/her ability to meet the demand being made, and belief in ability to control one's own behaviour are significant factors in

appraising a demand as stressful or otherwise. Maddi and Kobasa (1984) offer the concept of 'hardiness' as a mediating factor in the appraisal process. Hardiness encompasses feelings of personal control, desire to accept challenge and commitment. Karasek and Theorell (1990) suggest the term 'mastery' as reflecting the individual's control over their stress response.

Cox and Mackay (1978) identified five distinct stages to the transactional model of stress, which elaborate slightly the appraisal process identified by Lazarus (1966). The first stage is the demand itself. This can be internal or external, psychological or physiological. The second stage of the process is the individual's perception of his own ability to cope with this demand. The stress may occur when there is an 'imbalance' between demand and ability to cope. This 'imbalance' may not be 'actual', what is important is the perceived demand and the perceived ability to cope.

If a situation demands too much of man, but he has not realised his limitations, he will work on without being stressed until it becomes obvious to him that he cannot cope. He must then recognise his limitations and the imbalance between demand and capability. He then experiences stress.'

(Cox and Mackay 1978 page 18)

Perceived imbalance will cause the individual to experience stress which determines psychological and physiological changes to the individual which constitutes the third stage in the process, which Cox and Mackay regard as 'coping'. The consequences of this 'coping' become the fourth stage in the process; this involves actual as well as perceived consequences of coping. As previously stated, it has been argued that the stress occurs if the consequences of not coping are important to the individual, for example in terms of a threat to self-esteem or well-being (Sells 1970; McGrath 1970). Lowe and McGrath (1971)

suggest smaller imbalances between perceived demand and perceived ability to meet the demand may be more stressful than larger imbalances due to the uncertainty in outcome to situations where the imbalance is less; this uncertainty increases the demand and the individual's response to it. However, it may be argued that if this uncertainty exists, it is more likely to frustrate or anger the individual and thus exacerbate his/her stress response.

Cox uses the term 'feedforward' to describe this fourth stage. The fifth stage is 'feedback', which also occurs at every other stage. 'Feedback' is the result of the responses, either physiological or psychological, made at each stage and may alter or influence the perception of stress or alter the nature of the demand. Cox suggests that perhaps the most important one is the coping response. He states: 'inappropriate and ineffective response strategies will invariably prolong or even increase the experience of stress' (Cox 1978). This confirms the findings of other writers who maintain individuals are not 'victims of stress' but frequently behave in ways which create, maintain or exacerbate the stress experienced (Meichenbaum 1983; Phillips 1978; Selye 1956). These five stages describe what Cox terms 'the operation of stress'. This transactional model of stress is represented in Figure 4 (Reproduced from Cox 1978 page 19).

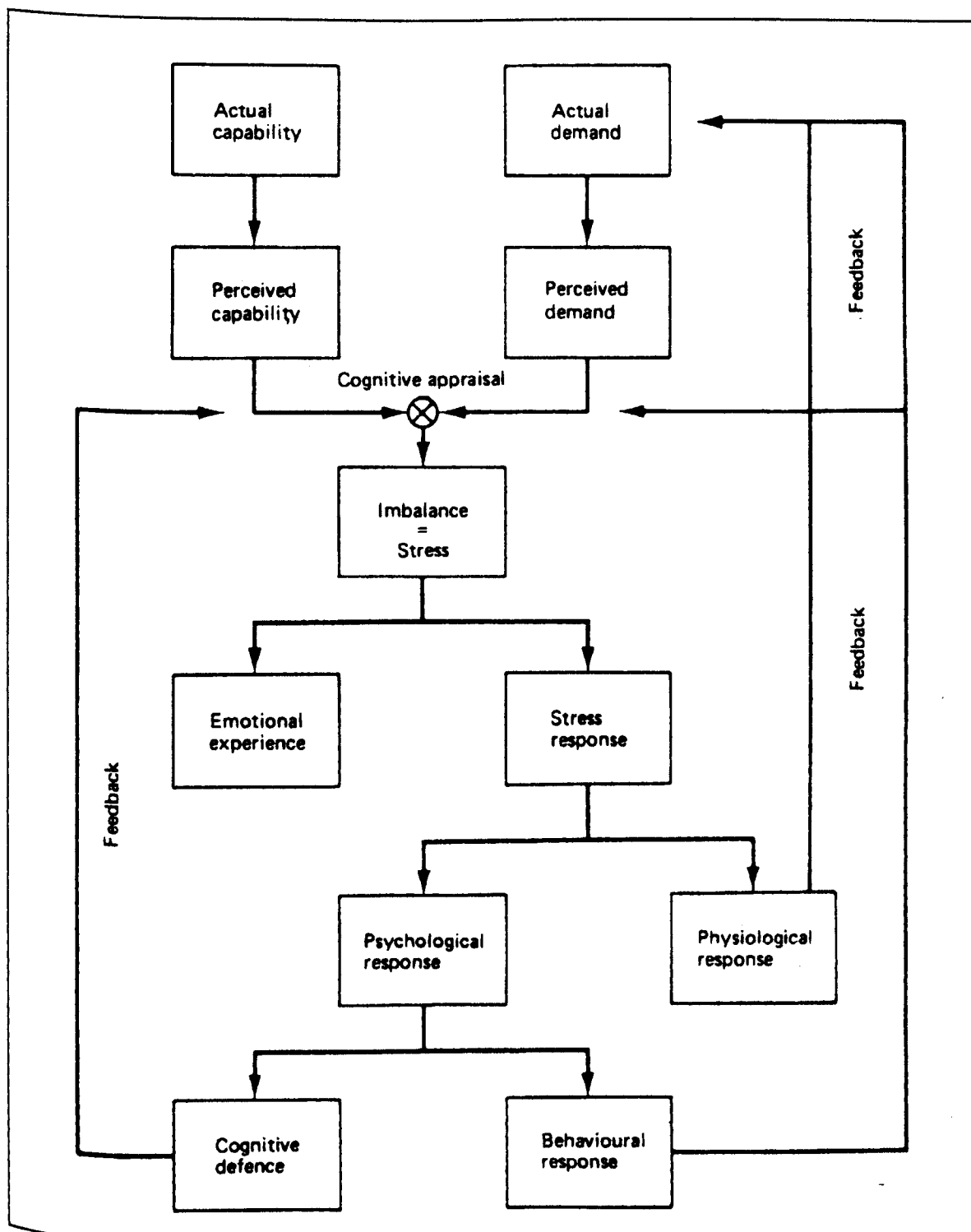


Figure 4 The Transactional Model of Stress

As with the concept of stress itself, a number of different theories have evolved as to the nature of coping. Coping has been viewed as a psychoanalytical process; as a personal trait or style; as a description of situational-specific strategies; as a sequence of

stages; and as a taxonomy of strategies (Dewe, Cox and Ferguson 1996). Lazarus and Launier (1981) describe stress as a misfit between the characteristics of the individual and his/her environment, and coping as a state of fit between the two (Woolfe 1984). Meichenbaum (1983) regards coping as a type of problem solving and Evans (1991) sees coping as the way individuals control their environment. In general terms coping refers to the response the individual makes to the demand and may involve either adjustment to a situation or adjustment of a situation (Cox 1987).

Lazarus (1966) suggests coping has three main features: it is the process the individual goes through, what he/she thinks or does, when in a stressful situation; it is influenced by the appraisal which initiates it and the resources available to the individual to manage the situation, and that it should be defined independent of outcome that is, regardless of whether or not the coping is successful as coping refers to the effort the individual has made to overcome the stress, not to the outcome of those efforts (Murgatroyd 1982).

Meichenbaum (1983) suggests that although there are diverse coping strategies they all serve one of two major functions: either to alter the situation which is causing the stress or to reduce the amount of emotional distress experienced. He suggests that certain situations can be changed by altering the physical or social environment, and that 'palliative' strategies of coping help 'emotion regulation' (Meichenbaum 1983).

Pearlin and Schooler (1978) make a distinction between coping resources and coping responses. An individual's coping resources refers to the means they have available for coping for example, use of social support and positive self-esteem; coping responses refers to what the individual actually does in order to cope. Pearlin and Schooler offer three types of coping resource/response which can be used in any combination and at any time.

They suggest that flexibility is the best approach to coping with stress. Their three types of coping are firstly to change the situation and therefore solve the problem causing the stress (mainly use of coping resources); controlling the meaning of the situation and controlling the stress itself (use of resources and responses).

Plancherel and Bolognini (1995) elaborate these three categories: problem-focused coping which involves direct action to either eliminate or reduce the demand, or an increase in resources in order to manage the demand; appraisal-focused coping which requires a redefinition of the demand so that it becomes more manageable; emotion-focused coping which aims to manage the individual's feelings engendered through experiencing the demand. It is not known whether one coping strategy is better than another but research by Seiffge-Krenke (1990) showed that problem-focused coping strategies are more prevalent than emotion-focused strategies (Plancherel and Bolognini 1995). Compas et al (1988) suggest that individuals use more problem-focused coping than emotion-focused coping in situations they perceive as not being inevitable and therefore changeable (Compas, Malcarne and Fondacaro 1988).

These three models of stress seem to form the foundations of many of the definitions of stress described in the literature (Cox 1978, 1995; McGrath 1970; Fisher 1986; Meichenbaum 1983; Field, McCade and Schneiderman 1985; Sutherland and Cooper 1990; Sarafino 1994; Ogden 1996). I will next discuss my own definition and model of stress which is transactional in nature. I agree with the ideas of Compas, Orosan and Grant (1993) who suggest that response-based approaches (subjective) and stimulus-based approaches (objective) are not sufficient alone to understand individual differences in the experience of stress and vulnerability to stress. Stress is much more complex than a simple stimulus or response; it is a dynamic interaction between the environment, the individual's

perceptions of the environment and the individual's physiological, psychological and behavioural responses to the environment.

A WORKING DEFINITION

The lack of consensus over definition, and the way the word stress has become synonymous with concepts such as anxiety, conflict and frustration, contributes to its elusiveness. However, strands of agreement emerge from the definitions and in simple terms I would describe stress as an individual phenomenon which involves both cognitive and perceptual processes which need interpreting in relation to the individual's environment (social and physical) as well as to themselves; it is not necessarily a negative experience although it would seem that most individuals find it undesirable. It is experienced physiologically and psychologically and is very closely related to an individual's personality, culture and social background. The individual may be unaware of some physiological responses in the short term, for example neurobiological changes, but psychological responses will manifest themselves in terms of feelings of threat, anxiety, fear and worry, for example, however, this will vary from individual to individual. There will also be behavioural responses which again, will vary from individual to individual. The individual's perception of their ability to cope with stress is an important mediating factor as to the severity and duration of the stress and its psychological, physiological and behavioural manifestations. The author's definition of coping will be included in the explanation of the stress model.

My own psychological model of stress draws upon ideas from Lazarus (1974), Sells

(1970) and Cox (1978), among others, and conceptualises stress as a five stage process which I will describe here briefly and elaborate upon in relation to school stress in the following chapter.

Stage one is the situation/event/demand itself, which is the potential stressor; stage two is the individual's appraisal of the potential stressor; appraisal is based on such factors as previous knowledge and experience of the potential stressor, culture, expectation, motivation, self-esteem and self-confidence; if the individual perceives the potential stressor as an actual stressor, he/she will move to stage three which involves a second appraisal or assessment of the individual's perception of their ability to cope with the stressor; this second appraisal will be based on such factors as the individual's known coping skills and their potential effectiveness, and whether the individual perceives the potential stressor as a threat or a challenge. Both 'threat' and 'challenge' appraisals can be deemed potentially stressful, but I would suggest that the individual who appraises a potential stressor as a challenge will also recognise some positive gain from successfully coping with the potential stressor, whereas threat appraisals are more negative and not necessarily likely to bring any rewards. (For example, the challenge of taking a driving test and the threat of being involved in a driving accident). Stage four considers the importance of coping to the individual at a personal level and the consequences of not coping, and stage five is the stress response itself which can range in severity from a minor feeling of threat to well-being to a severe state of immobilization.

I would argue that the stress response actual begins, albeit mildly, at stage two. The task of appraisal of the demand itself may bring feelings of threat or challenge which will either be eliminated or exacerbated at the next stage. In stage three, if the potential stressor becomes an actual stressor and the individual doubts his/her ability to cope, the feeling of

stress will increase. If the individual still perceives the stressor as actual but has confidence in his/her ability to cope, the feeling of stress may remain constant, become more slight or even disappear. If no actual stressor is perceived and so coping, or not coping, is not an issue for the individual, the feeling of stress will disappear. At stage four, the individual will consider the personal consequences of not coping. The greater the consequences, the more intense the feeling of stress. The full stress response is the final stage where the individual has negatively assessed his/her ability to cope with a potential stressor he/she has perceived as actual, when the personal consequences (physical, psychological or behavioural) of not coping are important to him/her. The stress could be quite mild if the consequences of not coping are considered relatively unimportant to the individual, or severe where the consequences of not coping are critical. Coping is viewed as having the personal strategies available to effectively manage the physical and psychological symptoms of stress so that the individual can meet the demand being made successfully and without any reduction in performance, or having the ability to manage or redefine the situation so that the amount of stress being experienced can be tolerated at a level which will not hinder performance. Not coping is viewed as lacking the personal resources needed to cope, or having no strategies (or inappropriate or unsuccessful strategies) to use to manage either the physical and psychological symptoms of stress or the situation, and the individual being aware that this is the case. If the individual is not aware that this is the case, he/she will believe themselves to be coping until it becomes obvious that they are not. Not coping is the experience of stress itself which at one extreme may be quite mild but in its severest form, may lead to panic and complete immobilization. This model of stress is represented in Figure 5 and differs from the transactional model of stress illustrated in Figure 4 in several ways.

The author's model of stress

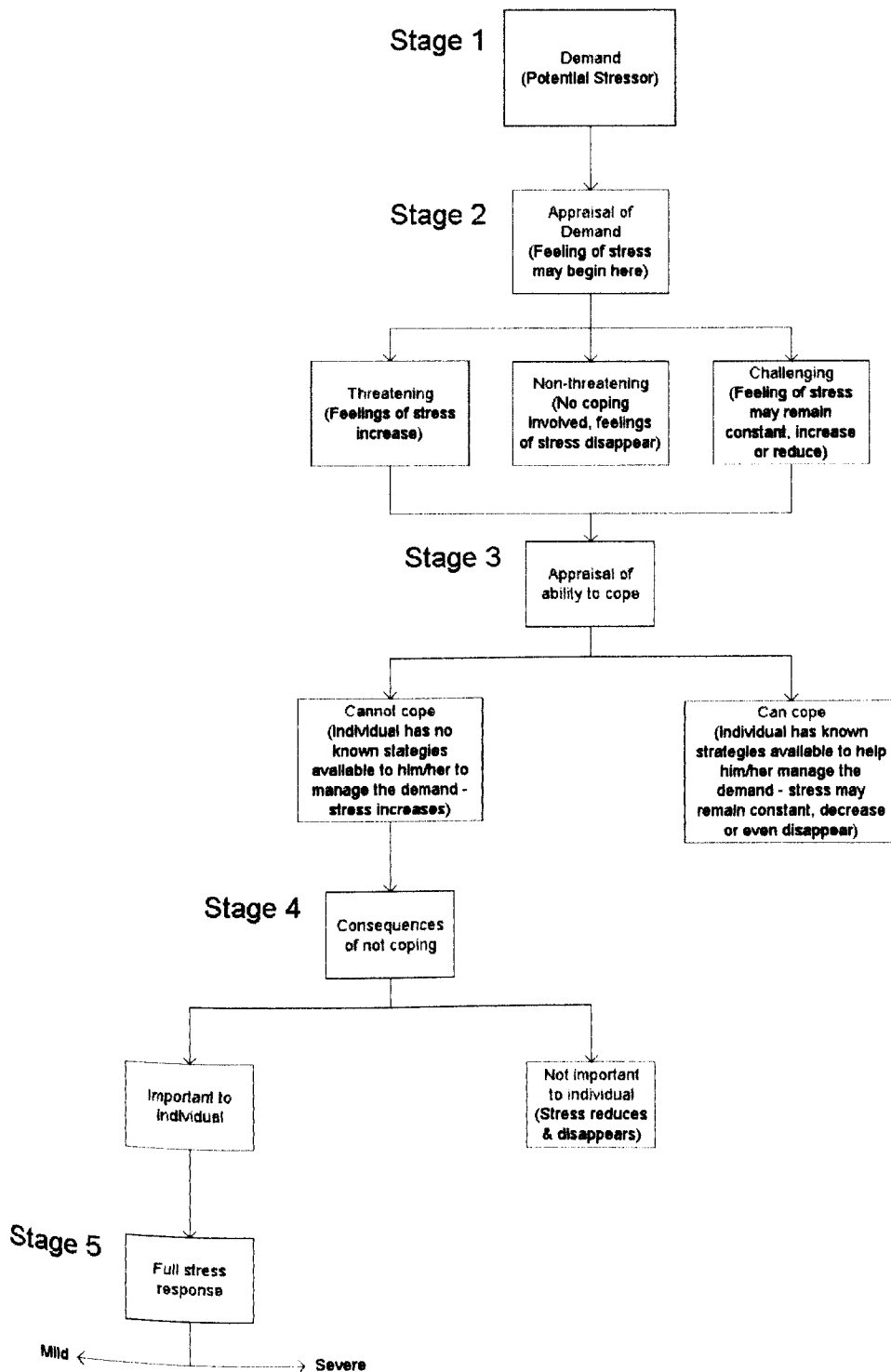


Figure 5

It does not distinguish between actual and perceived demand and capability; it assumes stress results from an imbalance between the individual's perception of a potential stressor and their perception of their ability to cope. It suggests three types of possible appraisal of potential stressors, two of which may lead to a full stress response, and recognises the perception of both challenge and threat as potentially stressful. The personal consequences of not coping are more significant in determining a full stress response, and coping is viewed in relation to outcome, not as Lazarus suggested, independent of outcome. The model is more person-centred in that it allows for a range in intensity and duration of individual responses to potential stressors, and recognises that these are not necessarily constant over time. The model is intended to be 'research friendly' and is used to inform the operational definition of stress used in this research.

It may well be impossible to write the 'definitive definition' of stress and it is unnecessary for the purpose of this particular research. Any definition of stress is open to individual interpretation and therefore of little value in trying to supply a 'universal truth'. Kelly's personal construct theory (1955), emphasises how individuals differ in their interpretation of their experiences and how they behave according to their anticipation of events:

'Each of us sees our situation through the 'goggles' of our personal construct system. We differ from others in how we perceive and interpret a situation, what we consider its implications, the degree to which it is clear or obscure, threatening or promising, sought after or forced upon us.'

(Bannister and Fransella 1971 page 22).

Kelly's theory is helpful to understanding how individuals perceive their stress

because 'in focusing on the individual's values, perceptions and belief systems about the world, it attempts to see the world from the individual's point of view' (Batty and Hall 1986). So this research attempts to understand the stress pupils report to experience within the context of their perceptions of their school environment. It accepts, unconditionally, the pupils' self-reporting of feeling stress at school and the school stressors they describe as being genuine for them. It therefore very much belongs to the school of thought that 'stress is in the eye of the beholder' (Sarafino 1995; Haan 1993).

Therefore, for the purpose of this research it is enough for the young people taking part to report a feeling or experience which they call 'their stress'. There is little consensus and there does not need to be. The research is taking on board the myriad of interpretations as to what 'stress is' and is being enriched by them. It concerns children and their experience of what they call 'stressful' in their school lives. However, it is important to establish some 'common ground'.

With this in mind an operational definition of stress, based on the transactional model previously outlined, was formulated for this research. The nature of the research to some extent also helped determine the definition. The definition had to be accessible to children of varying abilities from the ages of eleven to sixteen and therefore quite simply expressed, and non-judgemental. It was important not to suggest that stress was either a 'good' or a 'bad' experience in the definition, as the research is concerned more with the individual child's interpretation of what stress is or is not, rather than trying to conform to a recognised and 'approved' definition. Although the definition does suggest types of situation which may be deemed 'stressful', for example situations of harm and challenge, the research itself adheres strictly to the model of stress outlined earlier: that it is the individual's perception of the situation, his/her perceptions of their ability to cope and the importance of

coping or not coping, which is crucial to the experience of stress. The suggestion of situations of harm or challenge as potentially stressful, and the decision to include a selection of related emotions, was purely to help establish some common ground to the pupils' thinking and to reassure them that many different and varied situations and experiences, which may or may not relate to those I suggested, can come under the umbrella term of 'stress'.

The definition is as follows:

'The term 'stress' is often used to describe dangerous or possibly harmful situations which make us feel physically uncomfortable or threatened. It might also make us feel anxious, nervous, worried or frightened. However, stress is not always an unpleasant experience. It can be very challenging. It can motivate us and bring positive benefits.'

In chapter two I will review some of the literature on adolescent stress and school stress and relate my own general model of stress to school stress. In this review, I have selected research which has investigated more general areas of adolescents' 'worries', 'concerns', or 'problems' and not confined the review to investigations of 'stress' alone. This has enabled a wider range of research to be included which conforms to the general heading of 'areas of anxiety in the lives of adolescents', but which might not necessarily be compatible with the concept of stress as the writer or the reader define it.

CHAPTER TWO

STRESS IN ADOLESCENCE AND SCHOOL STRESS

It would be impossible to move on to a discussion of stress in secondary schools without at first making some fundamental comments on the concept of adolescence; a more detailed discussion is beyond the scope of this research but will be referred to again where and when appropriate to the discussion of stress.

The term 'adolescence' comes from the Latin 'adolscere' meaning 'to grow into maturity'. However, it is not easy to define in terms of age. G. Stanley Hall was one of the first psychologists to consider the subject of adolescence, and is often termed 'the father of adolescent psychology'. His book 'Adolescence' was first published in 1904; he suggests that this 'stage in life' can last anything from the ages of twelve to twenty five, beginning with puberty and ending in maturity to adulthood.

Thinking and understanding of adolescence has gradually changed over the years; the impossibility of classifying young people of the same chronological age together has been recognised in research which has demonstrated the existence of too much individual variation. Adolescence is now much more popularly recognised as a 'transitional process' rather than a 'stage of life'; it is a 'time during which the individual passes from one state - childhood - to another - maturity' (Coleman and Hendry 1990).

Traditionally, adolescence has been associated with 'storm and stress'; a problematic period marked by tension and conflict, rebellion and emotional instability. These traditional theories of adolescence, chiefly attributed to psychologists such as Erik Erikson, Anna Freud and Peter Blos, have been challenged and not all experts would agree that adolescence is a problematic period for the individual. For example, Offer and Sabshin

(1984) claim that only about 21% of their sample experienced a 'tumultuous adolescence', about the same percentage reported feeling confident and experienced few problems during their adolescence, while 35% experienced emotional and mental 'spurts'. However, it can be universally accepted as being a 'critical period' in individual development and as such, one that can have significant implications for adult development.

It is also a critical period in family life and the importance of the family must not be underestimated. Olsen et al (1983), in a large cross-sectional study of families, found that adolescence was 'clearly the most stressful stage of the family life cycle'. The study showed that:

'Marital and family satisfaction, family pride and marital communication were all lower for families with adolescents than for any other group of families, and family stress was higher than at any other stage.'

(Noller and Callan 1991 page 79).

This study also showed that families that cope well with 'transition to adulthood' are close and supportive with a flexible approach to solving family disputes; in such families, autonomy and communication are encouraged (Olsen et al 1983).

School inevitably influences adult development; secondary schools, in particular, will inevitably influence this 'transitional process' of the individual - the 'critical period' of adolescence.

Although interest in teacher stress has grown considerably over the last decade, concern regarding pupil stress has received a much lower profile (Dunham 1989). Similarly, while interest in adult stress and coping remains undiminished, comparable interest in adolescent stress and coping is limited (Seiffge-Krenke and Shulman 1993). Research into adolescent stress generally has been conducted mainly in America, Australia, Canada and

Britain and shows a consistently worrying relationship between stressful events and adolescents' coping strategies, and the onset and maintenance of psychological distress and psychopathy (Compas, Orosan and Grant 1993), psychological maladjustments (Hains 1992) and emotional and behavioural problems (Compas, Malcarne and Fondacaro 1988). According to Garton and Pratt (1995):

'Stress in young people is now recognised as a major issue for concern, for children and adolescents, and their families.'

(Garton and Pratt 1995 page 625).

Garton and Pratt suggest that the effects and consequences of stress in children and adolescence are less well known than in adults, but that there is growing evidence of its negative contribution to poor health in young people. Omizo, Omizo and Suzuki (1988) endorse this view and suggest that adults may underestimate the amount of stress experienced by young people, believing them to be immune as they do not have to assume responsibility for many things in their lives. They suggest all stress has negative effects, the worst of which includes: depression, impulsive, aggressive, anti-social or self-destructive behaviour:

'All stresses have negative effects on the physical, emotional, social and psychological development of children, which are similar to the negative effects of stress on adults.'

(Omizo, Omizo and Suzuki 1988 page 267).

Youngs, Rathge, Mullis and Mullis (1990) claim adolescent stress as a 'major concern' because of its negative consequences and relationship with delinquent conduct, school-related performance, classroom burnout and self-esteem.

However, as with adults, there are enormous individual differences in vulnerability

to stress and stressful situations, and in subsequent ability to cope, which mediate the individual stress experience. Compas et al (1993) suggest:

'Stress is a pervasive feature of human development throughout the lifespan, and the adolescent period is certainly no exception. Stressful experiences of both an acute and a chronic nature are important in the course of normal as well as disrupted development during adolescence. Moreover, the role of stressful experiences in adolescent development depends on the ways in which individuals attempt to cope with stress and adversity. Adaptive coping responses may reduce some stressful experiences to the level of momentary disruptions while other patterns of coping may exacerbate stress and contribute to long-term, pervasive negative outcomes.'

(Compas, Orosan and Grant 1993 page 331).

Many studies have tried to investigate stress during childhood and adolescence from a stimulus-based approach where stress is conceptualised in terms of a demand, an event or experience for example, which requires the individual to make some sort of adaptive response. Predominant are studies which aim to measure stress in terms of major life events and their negative effects on psychological functioning and possible implication in the development of ill health. As Seiffge-Krenke and Shulman note:

'The typical approach involves studying the reactions of small homogeneous groups of adolescents to an extremely stressful, non-normative event such as kidnapping, rape, death of friends or family members, or contracting a serious illness.'

(Seiffge-Krenke and Shulman page 171 in Jackson and Rodriguez-Tome 1993).

Other studies have used a more transactional approach and have investigated stress within life span development, where stressful events are viewed as developmental in nature and able to make positive contributions to personal growth. Other approaches have examined the relationship between stress and adaption (Compas, Malcarne and Fondacaro 1988) and stress and coping (Frydenberg and Lewis 1991; Porteous and Fisher 1980;

Plancherel and Bolognini 1995); where coping is viewed as the individual's overall efforts to respond to stress, but not necessarily his/her successful adaption to either the stress or the stressor.

Compas (1987) in conceptualizing stress within life events, suggests three dimensions to stress in childhood and adolescence which need consideration: the demand as normative or atypical; large or small in magnitude; acute or chronic in nature.

Some research studies focus entirely on major life events which are atypical (Coddington 1972; Johnson and McCutcheon 1980) while others also include daily hassles and upsets which are normative (Compas, Davis, Forsythe and Wagner 1987; Garton and Pratt 1995). Compas suggests both normative and atypical events should be considered as research with adults has implicated both the hassles and the pleasures of daily life as significant to the experience of demand (DeLongis, Coyne, Dakof, Folkman and Lazarus 1982). As Seiffge-Krenke and Shulman (1993) suggest:

'Although earlier research has provided a strong foundation for the study of stress and critical life events, it seems likely that considerable advantages can be derived from exploring the role of daily stressors in the lives of adolescents.'

(Seiffge-Krenke and Shulman page 173 in Jackson and Rodriguez-Tome 1993).

Whether these events are cumulative, occurring in combinations or separate events is also significant. Hains (1992) suggests that the relationship between major life events, stress and psychological problems is mediated by daily stressors; a greater contribution to such problems occurs if daily stressors are experienced cumulatively or in combinations.

Cumulative events, combinations of events and separate events, whether they are major life events or daily hassles and pleasures are considered acute demands; demands which require some situational adjustment by the individual or demands which upset the

'status quo'. Chronic demand may result from environmental conditions or personal characteristics, deprivation or disability for example, and are more enduring in nature.

From these dimensions, three broad categories of stress in adolescence are suggested: generic or normative stress; severe acute stress; and severe chronic stress (Compas et al 1992).

Generic or normative stress will be experienced by all adolescents as a normal part of their development. It includes both daily stresses and hassles and normative major life events, transition to a new school for example. Some adolescents will also experience severe, acute stress in addition to normative stress, events in this category might include parental divorce, major illness or bereavement. In addition, some adolescents might also experience severe, chronic stress as a result of their environmental or personal circumstances for example, poverty or degenerative disease.

Life span development theory adds further characteristics to these categories of events: normative events concerned with social and biological development but which could become atypical if occurring at an unexpected point in the individual's life span for example, physical development in adolescence or change in family circumstances; the social distribution of events which may have an effect on individuals or on whole cultures for example, man-made or natural disasters; and finally, the cohort effect of shared cultural events which involves not only individual differences in the experience of the event within a cohort, but differences in experience between cohorts for example, the effects of war.

It is important to consider the transactional nature of stress when considering these categories of life events as stressors. On their own, they are potential stressors only, it is the transaction between the individual and the event which will deem it as stressful or not. As with adults, there will be enormous variation in the responses of adolescents to these

events. Not all these life events will be perceived as stressful by adolescents and some will have the resources to cope with the event more effectively than others. D'Aurora and Fimian (1988) note:

'Stress is actually a diverse collection of events, as well as the child's perceptions of and reactions to those events. It is also experienced in a variety of ways and for numerous reasons.....certain events can produce extreme stress for some children and not for others. Similarly, certain events prove to be very strong, yet extremely brief, while others occur with little strength, but do so for an extended period of time.'

(D'Aurora and Fimian 1988 page 44/46).

Referring back to my own definition of stress, it is important to consider how individuals perceive these events, the perceived importance of the event to the individual concerned, the coping strategies available to the individual and the perceived importance of coping or not coping which will result in the experience of stress, which might contribute negatively to the individual's psychological, physiological and social well-being. This is also suggested by Plancherel and Bolognini (1995) who hypothesize in their investigation into mental health during adolescence:

... psychological stress results from experiencing events or situations the subjects themselves perceive to be threatening or demanding adjustments which are beyond their capacities to cope with. These stressful agents can weaken the subjects' capacity to adapt in such a way that psychological difficulties could result. We further postulate that the influence of stressful life events on mental health is mitigated by 'protective factors' such as good coping styles, high social support and good self-esteem.'

Plancherel and Bolognini 1995 page 462).

Chandler (1982) suggests four basic behaviour response patterns to stress in children: dependent, impulsive, passive aggressive and repressed. The dependent response may manifest in passive behaviour typified by lack of independence and initiative in both

learning and social situations, or in demanding behaviour where defiance or immediate demand for gratification are common. The impulsive response may be displayed in 'acting out' behaviour where the child indulges in anti-social or trouble making activities, or in over activity demonstrated by acting without thought, short attention span and lack of self-control. Passive aggressive responses may compromise over-compliance in the form of procrastination and dawdling, or unco-operative behaviour in the form of stubbornness and indifference. Finally, a repressed response will manifest in anxious behaviour comprising of nervous mannerisms or fearfulness, or by withdrawn behaviour typically, introversion and daydreaming. In adolescents, responses to stress may take the form of approach or avoidance strategies. Approach requires action by the individual on the source of stress to promote change in the situation/event causing the stress, avoidance secures a reduction in the emotional distress being experienced by the individual concerned (Boekaerts 1993). Seiffge-Krenke and Shulman (1993) identify three types of adolescent coping responses to stress: active coping which involves the individual in actively trying to do something about the cause of stress; internal coping, where the individual reflects over possible solutions before embarking on a course of action, or withdrawal, where the individual ignores or avoids the stress and its consequences.

More recent studies into childhood and adolescent stress have adopted a more transactional model than investigations into life events as stressors, and have focused on the perceptions of adolescents themselves and obtained their views and opinions on what they find stressful, or what their perceptions are of adolescent problems, worries or concerns. Much previous knowledge and the selection of items for lists of life events had come from adult assumption or from other scales designed for adults and not adolescents (Garton and Pratt 1995) for example, the Coddington scale (1972a, 1972b) was adapted from Holmes

and Rahe (1967) originally designed for use with adults (Compas 1987).

One of the first studies to redress this discrepancy aimed to discover what, at the time, contemporary adolescents were concerned about (Porteous 1979). Porteous recognised that due to age and the changing nature of adolescent culture, adults were not necessarily accurately assessing the needs of young people. His study aimed to discover:

'... a closer understanding of the adolescent world to help us in the task of preventing problems arising from changes in social structure, environment and expectations which affect adolescents.'

(Porteous 1979 page 309).

In his review of the literature Porteous noted that, at the time of writing, research into adolescence in Britain was lacking and that much of the research completed was American in origin. This early research had mainly involved the ranking of the importance of problems such as personal qualities, home and peer relationships. An American study, cited in Porteous (1979) by Clements and Oelke (1967) had found the ten most worrying problems among American adolescents to be:

- ▶ not spending enough time in study
- ▶ worrying
- ▶ wanting to earn some of my own money
- ▶ wanting to be more popular
- ▶ wanting advice on what to do after school
- ▶ worrying about examinations
- ▶ wanting a more pleasing personality
- ▶ can't forget some mistakes I've made
- ▶ needing to learn how to save money

- ▶ can't keep my mind on studies

In this study, four of these problems are directly related to academic aspects of schooling, and at least two of the other problems mentioned (wanting to be more popular and wanting a more pleasing personality) have implications for social aspects of schooling. This highlights the predominance of school-related concerns in this study for the American adolescents involved.

An Australian study, also cited in Porteous (1979) investigating the problems of adolescents in Sydney by Collins and Harper (1974) reported boys showing twice as much concern over educational problems than girls, and girls reporting more problems in general than boys and twice as much concern over family adjustment (Porteous 1979).

Porteous found research of this nature lacking in Britain, and what was particularly scarce was research which aimed specifically to elicit the viewpoints of adolescents themselves as to their concerns and worries.

In his study, Porteous constructed a Problem Check List containing items drawn from clinical experience, previously published literature and problem lists and from informal discussions with adolescents. The one hundred and seventy seven items originally on the list were reduced to one hundred and sixteen after piloting and loosely categorised as problems relating to: employment, school, peers, self and home and family. The Problem Check List was completed by seven hundred and seventy five, fifteen year old pupils from four Northern Metropolitan schools. One in four of the pupils was then asked by letter to be interviewed, of which 65% agreed. The interviews lasted for approximately one hour and aimed to find out more about the problems of the adolescents, their coping strategies and where they obtained advice from. Porteous concluded:

'Many of the common problems of adolescents seem to be caused by the social and economic situation in which they find themselves. Unemployment and examinations are major worries and both these areas could be modified in various ways to alleviate some of their problematic impact.'

(Porteous 1979 page 317).

The higher scoring items on the check list relating to school included:

- ▶ the academic side of school
- ▶ parental pressure in relation to examination success
- ▶ unhappiness with courses
- ▶ concern over school work
- ▶ disciplinary aspects of school (although this was less frequent than items to do with the academic side of school)
- ▶ finding school oppressive

Porteous suggested from his results that for between twenty and fifty per cent of the pupils completing his Problem Check List, school provides the opportunity for its pupils to feel inadequate (Porteous 1979).

A subsequent DHSS funded study of a similar design by Porteous and Fisher (1980) revealed four main areas of adolescents' worries and problems:

- ▶ parents - caring and communicating
- ▶ employment and future life
- ▶ physical and social inadequacies of the individual
- ▶ conflict with authority and adult criticism

Although in this study school and specific academic concerns are not mentioned, there are clear implications of their significance within the categories concerned with employment and conflict with authority and adult criticism. Porteous and Fisher concluded

that within their sample of adolescents in their last year of compulsory education:

'..... few claimed to have no problems, and a considerable number had many.'

(Porteous and Fisher 1980 page 69).

At this time some American researchers were also becoming aware of the need to ascertain information about the ongoing concerns of adolescents from their own perspective. Smith (1980), critical of check lists for this purpose designed by adults on the basis that: they assume those who select the items on the lists know intuitively what the concerns of adolescents are; they are therefore biased and do not reflect the true concerns of adolescents and that they can only demonstrate differences; designed his study to :

'.... obtain spontaneous responses about personal ongoing concerns and interests from a wide range of individual adolescents who are unhampered by immediate peer or adult influence.'

(Smith 1980 page 476).

Adolescents were asked their 'concerns' and what they would like to know more about in terms of 'desired information'. The main concerns expressed were:

- ▶ school/grades
- ▶ dating
- ▶ relationships with peers
- ▶ the future
- ▶ parents

The stronger items for desired information were:

- ▶ professions
- ▶ careers advice
- ▶ what to do about school and grades

Again, items relating to schooling have considerable predominance in the concerns of the young people in this study.

Similar findings were reported in an American study by Omizo, Omizo and Suzuki (1988) designed to explore the stressors and symptoms in elementary, intermediate and high school pupils. Twenty students from each grade were interviewed for approximately one and a half hours and questioned about stress, stressors, symptoms and coping. The most commonly cited, self-reported stressors in each age group were:

Elementary:

- ▶ family problems
- ▶ feeling different
- ▶ school related problems. Specific concerns were - performance in school; living up to parents' and teachers' expectations; pressure to do well and homework.
- ▶ discipline (school and home)
- ▶ general concerns

Intermediate:

- ▶ general adolescent problems
- ▶ peer pressure
- ▶ family problems
- ▶ not feeling contented
- ▶ school related problems. Specific concerns were - relevance of school; not doing very well; problems with teachers; difficulty in adjusting to teachers and peers and different school organisation.

High School:

- ▶ future
- ▶ school related problems. Specific concerns were - teachers not understanding them; getting good grades and courses to take in the future.
- ▶ peer pressure
- ▶ substance abuse
- ▶ family problems.

Clearly, again the relevance and importance of worries and concerns relating to schooling cannot be ignored, and also the difficulties surrounding family and peer relationships which emerge from these studies.

Greene (1988) investigated the self-reported stressors of American early adolescents and derived seven categories of stressors from questionnaires filled in by the subjects. The categories in this study were:

- ▶ personal loss
- ▶ school
- ▶ peers
- ▶ self
- ▶ family
- ▶ extra-curricular
- ▶ other

The results showed that six of the eighteen most frequently cited stressors 'occurred within or were related to the school context' (Greene 1988). Grades, exams and homework were the most frequently occurring school related stressors. The affective responses to these stressors were also investigated in the study; anxiety, sadness and anger were the

most frequently mentioned responses to school stressors making disruptive impacts on the subjects' school activities, peer relations, concentration, sleep patterns and self-esteem.

Greene (1988), for similar reasons as Smith (1980), was critical of earlier research into adolescent stress with its 'overreliance on adult informants'. By investigating stressors through the perception of the adolescents themselves, Greene was able to demonstrate early adolescents' perceptions of stress differ from those of adults. While broad agreement exists in general perception of events which are potential stressors, differences occur in their rating of the impact of such events (Greene 1988).

A more recent Canadian study by Mates and Allison (1992) highlights the relationship between academic stressors and home stressors. Their study investigated what has been termed by Wills and Shiffman (1985) as 'enduring life strain' with particular emphasis on the home and school. Enduring life strain refers to chronic, long term pressure associated with an individual's 'role' for example, being a student or being a teenager, and is distinct from major life events and everyday hassles.

Data collected from focus group discussions with students from three high schools in Toronto identified five different categories of stress for these students:

- ▶ parents/family
- ▶ work/money
- ▶ friends
- ▶ school and sport
- ▶ gangs/strangers/addiction and drugs

These students were selected from a range of academic abilities and the study aimed to obtain data to use later in an investigation into stress, coping and drug addiction. Therefore, the study may be biased in the selection of subjects and the management of

discussions. However, consistency was reported at all academic levels but the lowest, in the relationship between the family as a source of academic stress. Mates and Allison (1992) report:

'As expected, there was a considerable overlap between descriptions of school stress and stress due to relationships with parents. In fact, much of the tension associated with relationships with parents concerned disagreements about such issues as homework, grades and academic aspirations.'

(Mates and Allison 1992 page 472).

However, students at the lower academic level did not share the same academic tensions but displayed apathetic and negative attitudes towards their schooling (Mates and Allison 1992).

Raphael (1993), in his review of potential areas for school based personal development programmes identified similar, although broader, domains of 'challenge' and 'stress' for Australian adolescents; namely: transfer to secondary school; the development of adolescent sexuality; family conflict; parental mental illness; socio-cultural factors (for example, ethnic identity); substance use and abuse; work and career; abuse; social and anti-social behaviour and the carry-over of problems from childhood. Raphael suggests that some of these stressors are inherent in the ageing and development of adolescents, while others are a result of life events, social or biological challenge or threat. School-based personal development programmes are considered ideal for addressing some of these issues in order to promote resilience and enhance adolescent mental health (Raphael 1993).

Earlier studies in this country have revealed similar findings and suggest the major causes of concern among young people in Britain to be:

► employment or specifically being unemployed (Porteous 1979; Cherry and Gear

1987, Gillies 1989)

- worry over school work and examinations (Porteous 1979, Tabberer 1984, Sloboda 1990, Gillies 1989)
- family relationships (Porteous and Fisher 1980, Gillies 1989)
- self image (Cherry and Gear 1987)
- areas of school and job finding (Porteous 1979, Gillies 1989)

I have already discussed the work of Porteous (1979) and that of Porteous and Fisher (1980) and will briefly discuss these earlier British studies before considering more recent findings.

Tabberer (1984) conducted a survey to appraise the effectiveness of the NFER Teaching of Study Skills Project and was therefore focused mainly on students' study habits, attitudes and problems, and also their assessment of the study skills teaching they had received. One thousand, six hundred and fifty nine students from twenty two institutions completed a first questionnaire on their study skills, and seven hundred and sixty one students from nineteen institutions completed a second questionnaire.

From this data, Tabberer discovered a high percentage of students reporting anxiety about a variety of aspects of their study skills. He states:

'More than 50% expressed anxiety about being able to cope with large amounts of background reading, being able to get down to work, being able to concentrate properly, Knowing how to revise for examinations and having a good memory for facts. Between 30% and 50% indicated they were anxious about being able to organise study time, being able to plan an essay or report, having a wide vocabulary, being able to take notes from lessons or lectures, being able to judge the merits of an argument and being able to take notes from a book.'

(Tabberer 1984 page 3).

Although this study does focus on older adolescents in post sixteen education, it serves to emphasise the range of problems relating to study skills being experienced by these students and the scope for the work which could be done in secondary schools to address these problems, and to alleviate the anxiety they produce. It seems such anxiety continues in higher education. A study by Sloboda (1992) aimed to investigate the stress experienced by students undertaking their 'finals' in their last year of university. One hundred and sixty nine students at Keele University returned a questionnaire filled in at the end of their last examination in the Summer of 1988. Sloboda states that for these students 30% reported significantly high stress which may have led to performance degradation (Slaboda 1990).

Cherry and Gear (1987) investigated the vocational guidance needs of young people of average ability and below, and their worries and concerns about leaving school and securing employment. A questionnaire of sixty eight pre-determined items revealed the most highly rated worry to be fear of not finding a job at all. Other worries given high ratings included:

- ▶ worry of not being able to handle an interview
- ▶ worry about not knowing how to find a firm with a vacancy
- ▶ worry about feeling insecure in the first few days of employment

Lesser worries rated were:

- ▶ transport problems
- ▶ fear of being bullied by older workers
- ▶ worry about being paid less than friends

A second questionnaire collected data relating to more general worries not necessarily to do with work. Worry levels rose when pupils had left school and were at work, the most significant worries recorded were:

- ▶ health
- ▶ money
- ▶ getting on with parents
- ▶ getting on with the opposite sex
- ▶ getting on with peers of the same sex
- ▶ appearance

Cherry and Gear found younger pupils, specifically thirteen and fourteen year olds, more vulnerable to worry. They suggest a 'psychological vulnerability' amongst third year pupils (year nine) who reported 'relatively high levels of anxiety' and who:

'were significantly more likely than older pupils to report worries about school work and getting on with teachers, and for whom concern about health ranked third after finding a job and school work.'

Cherry and Gear 1987 page 69-70).

Gillies (1989) investigated the hopes and worries of the future of five hundred and forty seven, eleven to fourteen year olds in Nottingham, through questionnaire and interview. Approximately 50% of the youngsters mentioned unemployment and exam failure as their first choice worry. The other most frequently mentioned worries were:

- ▶ war

- ▶ own death
- ▶ money
- ▶ AIDS
- ▶ poor health
- ▶ marriage
- ▶ childbirth
- ▶ parents' death

The most frequently mentioned hopes for the future were:

- ▶ employment
- ▶ exam success
- ▶ happy marriage
- ▶ money
- ▶ pleasant home
- ▶ good health
- ▶ happiness
- ▶ peace

More recent studies have revealed very similar categories of worries and concerns. For example Balding (1992) conducted a major survey of the health-related behaviours of twenty three thousand and nine hundred, eleven to fourteen year olds, in one hundred and thirty two schools in England on behalf of the School's Health Education Unit at Exeter University. The results showed that approximately 20% of boys and 24% of girls worry about school; approximately 25% of boys and 36% of girls worry about their family; approximately 16% of boys and 31% of girls worried about their friends; other sources of

worry were money, health, career and personal appearance (Balding 1992)

A study by Carey (1993) aimed to investigate the types of 'life crises' experienced by pupils and which teachers had to subsequently deal with. Seventy seven potential life crises were identified by teachers from primary, secondary and teacher training institutions during discussion groups. The potential life crises were placed in one of seven categories determined by the teachers: individual, family, peers, school, community and global. The items relating to the category of school as perceived by the teachers were:

- ▶ death of a teacher
- ▶ new school
- ▶ exams
- ▶ expectations of teachers
- ▶ problems with teachers
- ▶ absenteeism
- ▶ abuse by teacher

This study aimed to investigate ways teachers could cope with pupils' stress and pupils' life crises without having any formal training in 'crisis management'. The teachers have suggested some interesting potential stressors which have not so far appeared on lists created by pupils. For example absenteeism is here seen as a potential stressor by teachers, but has not figured highly if at all on any of the lists pupils have contributed to. This perhaps reflects the adult, or teacher, perspective of this study. Where schooling is perhaps viewed more holistically by teachers than by pupils. Carey concludes that:

'most teachers' view their pupils' problems as having a basis in family life, or concerning the individual pupil. They appeared to view issues relative to the pupils' social life and position in society as a less significant source of problems.'

(Carey 1992 page 14).

Again this perhaps suggests that the teachers, although recognising the significance of the family as a source of stress, had underestimated the academic aspects of schooling as potential stressors leading to life crises

One final study of note concerning adolescents' worries and concerns is that of Millar, Gallagher and Ellis (1993) and the follow-up study by Gallagher and Millar (1996) conducted in Northern Ireland. The study aimed to discover the self-perceived issues which were of concern to young people in Northern Ireland and which caused them to worry, with the view to identifying individual needs in personal, social and academic domains (Millar, Gallagher and Ellis 1993).

Initially, the 'Things I Worry About' questionnaire consisted of eighty items grouped under eight domains, or general areas of concern. These were: at school or college; choosing a job; job finding; at home, starting work; opposite sex; myself and myself and others. Piloting suggested that six of these eight groups were valid and a 'free response' option suggested the existence of four new groups. These were labelled: social confidence/assertiveness; verbal communication; information/advice seeking and powerlessness. The categories of 'at school or college' and 'myself and others' were recombined to constitute the categories of social confidence/assertiveness and verbal communication. The three free response categories which could not be combined, created three new categories labelled: academic aspects of school/college; dealing with financial matters; and coping with change. It was felt that the resultant thirteen categories adequately

represented the range of worries typically experienced by adolescents in the fifteen to sixteen years of age range (Millar, Gallagher and Ellis 1993). The final list of domains was

- ▶ choosing a job
- ▶ job finding
- ▶ at home
- ▶ starting work
- ▶ opposite sex
- ▶ myself
- ▶ social confidence
- ▶ verbal communication
- ▶ information seeking
- ▶ powerlessness
- ▶ money matters
- ▶ academic aspects of school or college
- ▶ change

Within the category of academic aspects of school or college, the specific items of worry were:

- ▶ whether I will pass my exams
- ▶ having enough time to do my homework
- ▶ being under pressure from school/college work
- ▶ coping with stress from exams and coursework

- ▶ getting down to studying
- ▶ what will happen to me if I don't do well enough in school
- ▶ having to do subjects which are not important to me
- ▶ whether I am doing the right subjects

The 'Thing I Worry About' scale was completed by three thousand, nine hundred and eighty three, thirteen to eighteen year old students in twenty four institutions in Northern Ireland. The results show that the domain relating to the academic aspects of school or college to be the top in the rank order of all domains of adolescent worry on the scale. The rank order was:

- ▶ Schoolwork
- ▶ powerlessness
- ▶ finances
- ▶ change
- ▶ obtaining a job/course
- ▶ myself
- ▶ verbal communication
- ▶ starting work or college
- ▶ opposite sex
- ▶ at home
- ▶ information seeking
- ▶ social confidence

Within the thirteen categories, six of the top ten items of specific worry for these adolescents related to schoolwork or examinations:

- ▶ whether I will pass my exams
- ▶ what will happen if I don't do well enough at school
- ▶ not getting good enough grades to get a job/course
- ▶ never finding a job
- ▶ getting down to studying
- ▶ coping with the stress of exams and coursework
- ▶ what kind of work I will end up doing
- ▶ not making anything of my life
- ▶ being under pressure of school work
- ▶ people close to me dying

The results of this survey reflect the findings of many of the other studies cited in this review, and reinforces the almost 'universal' predominance of academic worries and concerns amongst young people today. As Gallagher and Millar (1996) state:

'The finding that schoolwork/examinations was a frequent source of concern for adolescents would reflect findings obtained in other cultures such as Canada, Australia, America and England. This category of worry reflected difficulties in studying, coping with pressure and in particular, fears about failure.'

(Gallagher and Millar 1996 page 28-29).

Despite the predominance of academic concerns in studies of the general worries and concerns of adolescents, studies which are dedicated to the further investigation of

specific school stressors are relatively harder to find.

Few people would disagree that going to school for the first time is a daunting experience, although not necessarily an unpleasant one, marking 'a major developmental milestone in the life of every child' (Schultz and Heuchert 1983).

Leaving home, and the carer the child has come to trust, being left in a new and strange environment, where the child has to learn new rules and accept authority from another unknown adult must be bewildering, at least at first, to the child. He or she has also to deal with mixing with larger groups of children who make equal demands on the teacher's time. He/she loses the personal and often instant attention he/she has been used to at home, and has to learn to become part of a group while still preserving his/her own unique individuality.

By the time these children arrive at a secondary school they 'know the ropes'; they understand, although not necessarily accept, the rules and routines of school life and can recognise some logic and meaning in most of it. However, the transition from junior to secondary school can still be a difficult experience. For some it will be the 'last leg' in their school career before they take their place as young adults in society and the 'world of work', if that is their choosing and their choices are available to them; for others their academic success in secondary school may lead them to further education or training; a few will drop out of the system entirely and choose more unconventional life styles. Whatever the final outcome the five years spent in secondary school is a significant stage in the process of 'becoming an adult'. When we look back on our school days, with either affection or disdain, it is usually the years spent at secondary school which spring to mind first-perhaps it is because they are the most recent or because they are the most significant; we all have stories to tell of our days at school which engender a range of emotions within us. Our

memories may be peppered with fondness and humour at one end of the spectrum or we may look back with anger and bitterness.

Although the vast majority of children cope more than adequately with their school experience, many can recall at least one occasion when they have felt unhappy or anxious about something connected with school. Isolated incidence might be considered normal, acceptable and no more than part of the 'learning process' but repeated, negative school experiences can cause great distress to pupils and may cause lasting damage. Although schools may not deliberately set out to be hostile places for pupils and their philosophies may be founded on the desire to provide the best quality education possible for pupils, whilst taking on board a commitment to their welfare and personal development, their pupils might not always share these perceptions of their education and school experience. Sadly, for some pupils school is a frightening, threatening place and their experiences are filled with anxiety and 'pain' as Schultz and Heuchert describe:

'The school experience includes far too many painful events for children, the accumulation of which eventually distorts or breaks the spirit of the child, with tragic consequences. These painful events may remain unseen at first, but await unfolding in the future.'

(Schultz and Heuchert 1983 page 19).

The concept of 'anxiety' and the notion of 'painful experiences' in school are closely linked with the concept of 'school stress'. Anxiety has been associated with response to stress (Grunker 1966), and school stress can be describe in much the same way as stress in general as discussed previously. Anthony and Thidodeau define psychological stress in school the following way:

'Anything that a student perceives as a threat - a threat either to his survival or to his self-image. Moreover, the threat does not need to be real - it needs only to be real to the individual. He/She must see it as a threat although in truth it may not be. Psychological school stressors produce a syndrome of subjective and objective responses. Dominant among the subjective reactions is a feeling of anxiety. Other emotional reactions such as anger, hate, depression, fear and guilt are also common subjective responses to psychological school stressors. Some characteristic objective responses are restlessness, fidgeting, criticising, quarrelling, lying and crying.'

(Anthony and Thidodeau 1979 page 672).

Lewis suggested a strong link between excessive anxiety and poor academic achievement in school. He observed the following symptoms in children suffering from anxiety:

Rapid heart beat; fast, uneven breathing; increased sweating; dry mouth; queasy tummy; giddiness or trembling; blushing and turning pale; muscle cramps and feeling sick. These physical symptoms are accompanied by negative thoughts and ideas as the child feels increasingly unable to cope. This further fuels the anxiety experienced and leads to a decline in concentration and impairment of intellectual ability. In instances of chronic anxiety the child might experience difficulties in getting to sleep at night despite feeling tired; nightmares and bed wetting; loss of appetite; apathy and an increase in minor illnesses such as headaches, upset stomach and sore throat.'

(Lewis 1992 page 32).

This reaction to anxiety correlates closely to the 'fight or flight' response to stress described earlier in Chapter 1. It is part of the human autonomic nervous system (ANS) over which we have little control, as its name suggests. The ANS has two branches: the sympathetic and parasympathetic. In normal situations these two branches work together to maintain the 'status quo'. In a situation of perceived stress, the sympathetic branch takes

over to prepare the body for 'fight or flight' and a vicious circle of anxiety begins. The brain might rationalise the situation if no actual physical harm is threatened, and the parasympathetic branch of the ANS will try to re-establish its balance. The result of this reaction is described by Lewis:

As a result the body becomes a battlefield, the sympathetic branch orders the heart to beat faster and the lungs to work more rapidly while the parasympathetic instructs both to slow down. Blood is removed from just beneath the skin and sent to the muscles, making the child turn pale. It is returned by the slow-down branch and so causes blushing. Additional blood, rich in oxygen and glucose, reaches the brain making the child light headed. Then it is diverted away again leaving them giddy. The muscles tense and relax until they feel like jelly. The inevitable result is confusion, uncertainty and a total inability to recall facts and figures that have been revised carefully and were known perfectly until the anxiety attack began.'

(Lewis 1992 page 33).

Fimian (cited in D'Aurora and Fimian 1988) groups responses to stress in terms of emotional or biobehavioural-fatigue manifestations. Common emotional responses to stress in young people include feelings of anxiety, insecurity, pressure, vulnerability and anger. Biobehavioural-fatigue manifestations include stomach pain, dizziness, fatigue, defensiveness, crying and/or the breakdown of friendships (D'Aurora and Fimian 1988)

The research suggests (Schultz and Heuchert 1983; Fimian 1986; Mills 1992), and my own investigation supports the suggestion, that school stress has three main sources, which demonstrate a clear distinction between life event stress and daily life stress and which relate closely to the broad categories of adolescent stress defined by Compas et al (1992) and discussed earlier in this chapter. The model used is essentially stimulus-based, with stressors viewed as being either events, situations, aspects of the environment or the individual:

- ▶ Sources relating to the school environment, or curriculum generated, inherent in the concept of 'schooling', for example: overcrowded classrooms or inadequate facilities; systems of assessment and examination.
- ▶ Sources arising from interpersonal relationships, for example: peer groups and friendships; relationships between teachers and pupils.
- ▶ Sources arising from life events which do not necessarily have a direct relationship to school but the effects are manifested in school, for example: bereavement and family difficulties; being in trouble with the police. (Schultz and Heuchert 1983)

Mills also describes three sources of stress which might result in children displaying symptoms of stress in school. Her categories are:

- ▶ The pupil as a source of his / her own stress. This category includes physical illness, terminal illness, personal appearance, physical handicap, moderate learning difficulties, autism, mental illness, homosexuality, speech defects, hearing impediments, sight impediments, religion and race.
- ▶ The home as a source of stress. This category includes physical deprivation, social deprivation, parental break-up, rows at home, bereavement, physical abuse, sexual abuse, parental pushing, parental objections to further education, sibling rivalry, parents' jobs (dangerous, armed forces, high stress), problems with the police, single parent family, adoption, poor communications at home, over-protection, under-

protection, parent with alcohol problems, parent with physical or mental health problems and stress in members of the family.

- ▶ The school as a source of stress. This category includes bullying, examination pressures, issues to do with being female, being new to the school, relationships with staff, staff shortages / high turnover of staff, racial and ethnic issues, streaming and setting, environmental conditions, witnessing bad behaviour in other children, aspects of school organisation and experiencing failure. (Mills 1992).

Fimian (cited in D'Aurora and Fimian 1988) identified the following categories of school stress: Student Distress, Social/Academic Problems and Poor Instructional Relations.

- ▶ Student distress is the largest category and mainly comprises events which necessitate change, for example: school entry, location changes within and across schools and the final years of school. Other sources include non-acceptance by peers, inability to make friends easily, inability to learn in school, inadequate leisure time and poor grades.
- ▶ Social/academic problems include teacher power over students, being or becoming the class pet, parental expectation, being fidgety, procrastinating, having to deal with excessive or ambiguous information and becoming tired.
- ▶ Poor instructional relations stressors include repetitious classwork, difficulty

conversing and communicating with the teacher, loneliness and excessive interruption of classroom routines. (D'Aurora and Fimian 1988).

A study by Dunham (1989) invited one hundred and thirty pupils, in two Gloucestershire comprehensive schools, to identify the major 'pressures' they experienced in their lives. These pupils identified three similar areas of their lives where pressure was experienced: in school; at home and other than in school or home. Although in this study the pupils were given the freedom to identify the pressures they experienced in their lives, there is no agreed definition of 'pressure' which might ensure that all pupils were identifying a similar phenomenon. Stress and pressure are used inter-changeably with the assumption that they are the same or have similar meanings for everyone. Despite this, there is consensus among the pupils who report similar pressures to those identified by Mills (1992) and Schultz and Heuchert (1983). These self-reported pressures were:

- ▶ Pressures in school - homework, decisions about options, learning difficulties, pressures from teachers, exams and tests, other pupils' behaviour, grades and bad reports.
- ▶ Pressures at home - behaviour of brothers and sisters, being treated by parents as if they were much younger people, control by parents, family arguments and worries about parents, for example, health and unemployment.
- ▶ Pressures other than school and home experiences - behaviour of other teenagers, behaviour of adults, little money, poor prospects, fear of nuclear war and ill-health

or body worries.

More specific school pressures identified by these pupils were: feeling inferior in certain subject areas; boring or authoritarian teachers; being pressured or made fun of by peers; feeling aggravated or irritated by teachers or peers, worry over not completing homework properly, not being able to revise for exams and feeling intimidated by exam situations. It is not clear from this study which area of pressure is the most problematic for the pupils taking part; what is clear, is that school pressures cause these pupils considerable anxiety and worry which may manifest itself in physical symptoms such as headaches, and psychological symptoms such as depression.

An investigation into stress amongst pupils in year 11 by Kyriacou and Butcher (1993) found academic stressors to be the principle sources of stress among the pupils in the study. The seventy eight pupils in this study, from an inner city comprehensive school in the North of England, were shown a video on pupil stress as part of their PSE curriculum and then asked to fill in a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of thirty items and the pupils were asked to tick items which made them feel 'nervous' or 'worried'. Over half the items on the list related directly to social or academic aspects of schooling, while other items reflected more general concerns such as parents, health and appearance. The four most frequently ticked stress items are similar to those identified in other investigations for example Gallagher and Millar (1996) and Dunham (1989). The items were:

- ▶ exams
- ▶ deadlines for assessed work
- ▶ revision

- ▶ what you will do when you leave school

In this study, teachers' views concerning what they felt the pupils' concerns would be were also investigated. There were differences as Carey (1993) found in his study. Staff ranked issues relating to self-image, and for girls appearance and relationships with boys, more highly than academic concerns. Carey also found teachers tend to rate individual concerns more highly than academic concerns, although the impact of neither should be under-estimated. Greene (1988) also noted discrepancy amongst early adolescents' and adults' estimates of the perceived impact of stressful events.

As in Dunham's study, stress is not formally defined in this study although the video the pupils watched would almost certainly have done so. The list of stress items the pupils were asked to tick on the questionnaire, was preceded by the question: 'Do you feel nervous or upset about any of the following?'. The use of the term 'nervous' and 'upset', seemingly interchangeably with the term stress, means that perhaps not all the pupils in the study were referring to the same phenomenon. While undoubtedly these are related feelings, it is arguably possible to feel nervous or upset without feeling stress. Indeed, some of the pupils in my own study, while being unable to articulate clear distinctions, felt that stress was a separate and different feeling from the associated feelings of nervousness and anxiety.

While serving to confirm the results of similar studies and adding weight to the evidence of the significance of academic stressors in the lives of adolescents, unfortunately, Kyriacou and Butcher's study did not seem to allow for pupils' contributions and perceptions of stress at the questionnaire stage, (although those pupils who attended the subsequent stress counselling course undoubtedly had the opportunity to do this in session

one), and is therefore driven by someone else's perception (presumably an adult's) of what year 11 pupils find stressful. Inevitably, watching the video on pupil stress prior to filling in the questionnaire would have given the pupils some pre-conceived ideas of situations considered to be stressful in school, again based on presumably, adult perception. The stimulus-based approach of the checklist does not allow for consideration of the context of the event, for personal interpretations as to the significance of the event, the cumulative effect of events or the passing of time. The importance of the individual's appraisal of the event, as a significant factor in determining the degree of threat or stress it can induce, has been neglected.

Research which has investigated the significance of the individual's appraisal of a demand has been completed in the Netherlands by Boekaerts (1993). In her research into the affective learning, Boekaerts presents her 'adaptable learning process' which has been extended and refined over the last decade. Adaptable learning is described as the balance between a student's desire to learn and his/her maintenance of resources and well-being, taking into account 'contextual, social and emotional factors' (Boekaerts 1993). When students are able to maintain this balance and are achieving their learning intentions they attain 'mastery mode'; if the balance slips and learning is not occurring, the student aims to restore well-being and adopts the 'coping mode'. In her research into how this balance is tipped, Boekaerts investigates the importance of the appraisal process to the individual's subsequent learning intentions and performance outcomes. Boekaerts' work has been influenced by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and Lazarus and Launier (1978) and their transactional theory of stress discussed previously. Boekaerts theorizes that:

'... when an individual appraises a learning situation and notes a discrepancy between perceived task demands and perceived resources to meet these demands, he or she may experience negative emotions, a change of mood, and concern for well-being. It stands to reason that these changes in affect will influence a person's functioning.'

(Boekaerts 1993 page 150).

Boekaerts suggests two complimentary aspects of students' appraisal of a demand: firstly, those based on the individual's competence in managing the demand, his/her perceptions of the attractiveness of the demand and willingness to accept the challenge. This aspect is termed 'situationally induced self-efficacy and pleasure'. Secondly, those based on the individual's perception of the difficulty of meeting the demand, expectation of success as an outcome and the perceived utility of the demand. This aspect is termed 'situationally induced outcome expectancy'. Boekaerts' research seemed to suggest that students who made optimistic appraisals of demand tended to form a behavioural intention to learn and aspiration to mastery mode, though not necessarily achieving it, while more pessimistic appraisals were associated with the maintenance or restoration of well-being, or adoption of the coping mode.

In Boekaerts' study of stress and coping in the classroom, students were asked to rank forty two 'stressful situations' (identified from structured interviews with pupils) and rate them according to their problematic nature and the intensity of the feelings they created in the individual. Boekaerts found the students perceived each of the situations as belonging to one of four categories, the first two of which relate to academic situations and the second two relate to social situations: confrontation with failure and shortcomings and confrontation with taxing academic demands; identification with stress in others and social isolation.

Boekaerts discovered in this study that students in the eleven to thirteen age range reported more problematic social conflict situations than academic situations; the frequency of situations does not affect the intensity of the emotion experienced except for specific emotions in specific categories; more anxiety was reported in academic situations than in social conflict situations where more anger and sadness are reported; and finally more approach and less avoidance is used in academic situations than in social conflict situations, however, boys (younger boys especially) used more avoidance than girls. From this, and from similar findings from a German study cited by Seiffge-Krenke (1990), it is suggested that students consider approach to be the best strategy to respond to stressful academic situations and to attain mastery mode, rather than avoidance strategies which would help in the short term to reduce the anxiety these situations create.

In the categories of academic stressful situations identified earlier, Boekaerts suggests anxiety and avoidance behaviour are associated more with confrontation with failure and shortcomings, and anger and approach behaviour are associated more with confrontation with taxing academic demands. This is due to the type of threat appraisal the individual makes, the amount of actual or perceived control over the situation the individual feels he/she has and the intentions the individual has for his/her coping behaviour.

The author's model of school stress

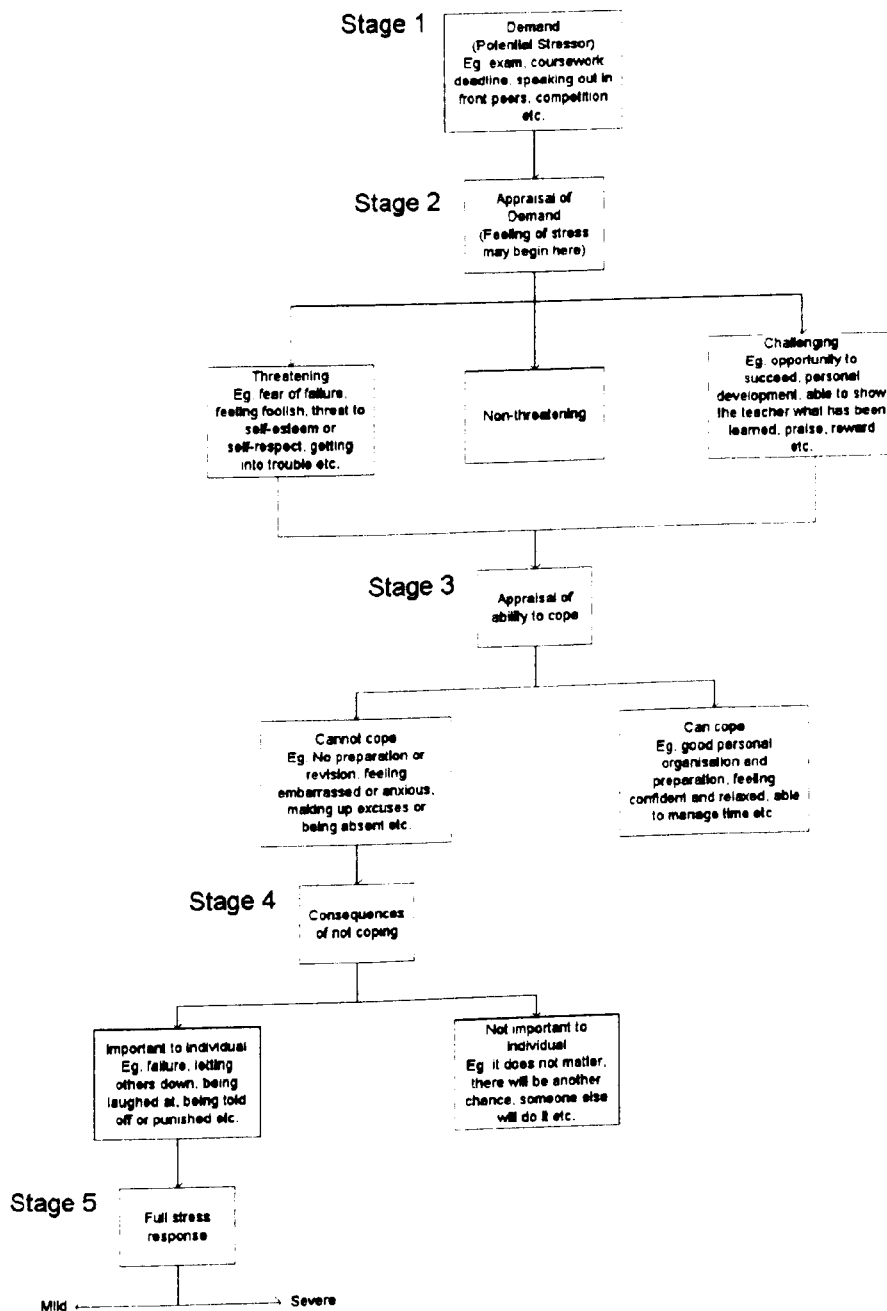


Figure 6

The author's own model of school stress which forms the basis of my research, is essentially a refinement to the general stress model described in Chapter 1 and illustrated in Figure 5. It is transactional in nature (Lazarus and Launier 1978; Lazarus and Folkman 1987) and places similar emphasis on the appraisal process described by Boekaerts (1993). It shares the ideas regarding potential school stressors described by Greene (1988); D'Aurora and Fimian (1988); Dunham (1989); Mills (1992) and Kyriacou and Butcher (1993) amongst others and is represented in Figure 6.

Within this model of school stress I expect that there will be a fairly lengthy, but exhaustive, list of school situations perceived as stressful by pupils. In keeping with the numerous studies already cited, the main stressors are likely to be associated with academic aspects of schooling, for example: exams, homework, coursework and internal assessments. There is also likely to be a range of what Greene (1988) termed 'idiosyncratic stressors': personal 'one off' stressors cited by a minority of individuals. Other potential sources of stress are likely to include relationships with peers and teachers. These potential stressors are seen as the demand.

The pupil will appraise the demand in relation to its context; this process will be influenced by such factors as: the personality of the individual; the social and cultural background of the individual; previous experience of the individual; self-concept of the individual; social support available to the individual; the timing and the importance of the demand.

The pupil will appraise the demand as either challenging, threatening or non-threatening. Challenge appraisals will occur when the pupil recognises demand with favourable consequences. This may be in terms of seeing an opportunity to succeed; in personal development from a learning situation; as a way of showing the teacher what has

been learned or that the individual has prepared well and worked hard; or knowing that reward or praise will be forthcoming. Threat appraisals will occur when the pupil recognises demand with unfavourable consequences. This may take the form of being made to feel foolish or experiencing failure; a threat to self-esteem and self-respect; getting into trouble with the teacher; or feeling unprepared or lacking the experience to meet the demand. Both challenge and threat appraisals may result in the start of a stress response. A non-threatening appraisal will remain neutral, being neither stressful or non-stressful.

Once the pupil has gone through this process of appraising demand, a second appraisal process will occur. This time, of the individual's ability to cope with the demand. It is at this stage that the demand may change from being a potential stressor to an actual stressor.

A positive appraisal of ability to cope will be based on factors and behaviours such as previous experience; good personal organisation and time management; known effective strategies to manage the demand; good preparation; feelings of self-confidence; feeling rested, refreshed and relaxed and being optimistic about the outcome of the demand. A negative appraisal of coping will be based on factors and behaviours such as feeling anxious or embarrassed by the demand; making up excuses to avoid it; complaining of illness or frequent absences; withdrawn or attention seeking behaviour in the classroom; feeling tired or apathetic and feeling pessimistic about the outcome of the demand.

Finally, it is the personal consequences to the individual concerned, of coping or not coping, which determines the full stress response which is in effect, not coping itself. If the pupil reasons that the consequences of not coping are minimal, based on arguments such as: it's not that important anyway; I'll get another chance later; I don't care; or someone else will do it for me, some mild feelings of stress may follow but are likely to be short lived. If

however, the consequences of not coping are important to the individual concerned, manifested in feelings of failure; feeling the individual has let others down: parents, peers or teachers for example; fear of being laughed at or being told off; or feeling there will be no more chances in the future, then acute stress will occur. This can be short lived but depending on individual circumstances and situations, could become chronic if effective ways of managing it are not found by the individual concerned.

The major areas of school stress as indicated by many of the studies cited in this chapter are related to the academic aspects of schooling, particularly areas where pupils experience competition and have to satisfy their own, and/or their parents' and teachers' expectations, with the inevitable consequence of success or failure (Gallagher and Millar 1996; Gillies 1989; Balding 1992; Dunham 1989).

In 1979, Johnson estimated that between 10% and 30% of American school students experienced school anxiety serious enough to hinder their school performance (Forman and O'Malley 1984). This estimate was confirmed a decade later by Elias (1989) who suggests that up to 30% of the American school population are debilitated by school stress resulting from an over-emphasis on academic success and competition in the school system. Elias believes that while some pupils do benefit from the academic emphasis of schools, others become alienated, 'psychological casualties' of misdirected academic demands:

'Paradoxically, placing an overlay of strong academic demands on the current educational climate is likely to result in few increases in learning and instead exacerbate current stress related problems and lead to further alienation among our student population.'

(Elias 1989 page 393).

Elias sees this sense of failure and alienation leading to further lack of motivation

and underachievement in school. As the pupil's self-esteem and self-confidence continue to declined, stress may manifest itself in delinquent and anti-social behaviour, substance abuse, irresponsible sexual behaviour, 'dropping out' and even suicide. D'Aurora and Fimian (1988) also see suicide as a 'last-ditch' manifestation of stress in young people and comment upon the dramatically rising suicide rate among American adolescents:

'Experts believe these young people are driven to suicide by a series of stressful problems involving humiliation, depression, failure in communication, and lack of loving help and support at crucial moments.'

(D'Aurora and Fimian 1988 page50).

The suicide rate for adolescents has also increased in Britain, although for all other age groups it is decreasing. Suicide is the third most common cause of death, after accidents and cancer, among fifteen to nineteen year olds. It is believed that at least six in every hundred adolescents are suffering from severe anxiety and depression. 1990 saw a two third increase in the number of young people seeking help and two thousand, five hundred under twenty five year olds admitted to hospital from mental and/or emotional disturbance ('Reportage' BBC 1991).

Many others have noted the changing political and social nature and pace of life in the last decades of the twentieth century (Coleman 1992; Coleman 1993; Raphael 1993; Cooper, Cooper and Eaker 1988) which present adolescents with their own unique problems which many adults can only begin to empathise with. Coleman (1992), speaking about Western society generally, states:

'The truth is that we live in strange, difficult and confusing times. In material ways we are richer than any of our ancestors. But in spiritual ways we are infinitely poorer..... We are surrounded by the gaudy signs of our wealth and the physical consequences of several thousand years of human ambition and endeavour. But despite all this, loneliness, unhappiness, anxiety and depression are now commoner than at any other time in our history. There has never before been as much sadness, dissatisfaction and frustration as there is today.'

(Coleman 1992 page 23)

Referring to adolescents in particular Coleman (1993) notes:

'Young people are growing up today in a world of uncertainty, where values are unclear, where cultures are on the move, where the nature of the family is altering. Such circumstances inevitably affect the adolescent transition to adulthood.'

(Coleman in Jackson and Rodriguez-Tome 1993 page 268).

Anxiety and worry over family break-up, unemployment, abuse, crime, sexual relationships, alcohol and drug misuse amongst other major life stressors, are just a few of the problems young people might be bringing into school with them. This, together with the many previously discussed potential stressors inherent in schooling, can make their lives over stressful and miserable.

This research sets out to discover the stress young people between the ages of eleven and sixteen experience at school, as seen through their eyes. It acknowledges from the previous studies described that much of this stress is likely to be 'daily life stress' and, to some extent, an unavoidable by product of this country's educational system, but it could exacerbate any 'major life stress' pupils might be experiencing outside their school life and compound their suffering.

This research sets out to answer questions, posed by an adult, from the viewpoint of a young person in full time, secondary education. These questions are:

- ▶ how do pupils describe the stress they experience
- ▶ what aspects of their school lives do they find stressful
- ▶ how does this stress make them feel

These questions were formulated from my review of other British studies which have posed similar questions, and aimed to contribute more detailed information to the existing body of knowledge in the area of school stress in this country. However, the aim of the research is not only to answer these questions, but also to consider ways schools and teachers can help their pupils manage the stress they experience in their lives at school, and to thus enhance the quality of their school experiences.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Kerlinger, defines research as:

' the systematic, controlled, empirical and critical investigation of hypothetical propositions about the presumed relations among the natural phenomena. '

(Kerlinger in Cohen and Manion 1989 page 4-5).

Often contrasted with experience and pure reasoning as a source of knowledge in three main ways: it is systematic and proceeds according to some rules; it is empirical and it is self-correcting.

Alternatively, Mouly states:

'Research is best conceived as the process of arriving at dependable solutions to problems through the planned and systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of data. It is a most important tool for advancing knowledge, for promoting progress, and for enabling man to relate more effectively to his environment, to accomplish his purposes, and to resolve his conflicts. '

(Mouly 1978).

In its simplest definition, research means:

'Systematic investigation towards increasing the sum of knowledge. '

(Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary 1972 page 1148).

Traditionally, research in social science has followed one of two main paradigms:

the normative or scientific, and the interpretive; generic terms conventionally used to describe positivist and anti-positivist viewpoints (Cohen and Manion 1989); two different and competing ways of understanding the world (Maykut and Morehouse 1994). There is considerable controversy and debate, largely of a philosophical nature, surrounding the most appropriate model to follow, and research techniques to use (Hitchcock and Hughes 1989).

The positivist approach reflects the scientific methods and procedures used in the natural and physical sciences to gain knowledge of the social world. Normative approaches to the understanding of human behaviour are linked to the idea that behaviour is rule-governed and predictable and can be observed and measured using the methods of the natural sciences. Medium and large scale research, conducted from 'the outside' are used to generalise from specific global rules or laws, to explain behaviour. Behaviour refers to responses to external environmental stimuli or to internal stimuli and has its roots in the past. Part of the aim of the research is to establish causality. Objectivity is an important factor and research methodologies are usually quantitative in nature and methods used include recording measurements, describing phenomena and performing experiments.

However, anti-positivists believe that the social world cannot be investigated by the same methods as the physical and natural sciences, as human beings cannot be treated in the same way as objects in the natural world; what distinguishes humans is their ability to think, feel, interpret, create and communicate. The only valid way of investigating the social world from an anti-positivist view point is to discover the meanings and interpretation of events from the perspective of the individual's experiencing them (Hitchcock and Hughes 1989). Interpretive approaches are usually small scale, subjective and concentrate on the individual's perceptions of the world. The research aims to understand and share the

experience of the individual and as such needs the personal involvement of the researcher. It is descriptive and seeks insight rather than quantitative data. Theory is emergent and rooted in data from 'everyday life' situations. Methods used tend to be qualitative: observation, interviews, accounts and diaries. (Cohen and Manion 1989).

This research does not conform directly to either of these two approaches; it is eclectic and uses methods from both the normative and interpretive paradigms, but has a bias towards qualitative methods and an interpretive approach.

The concept of stress itself is partly responsible for some of the methodological debate surrounding this research. I described the elusiveness of a single definition of stress in Chapter 1 and my desire to pursue the research using a subjective (meaning personal and introspective in nature) definition concentrating on the individual's perceptions of stress. This definition was informed by my own transactional model of school stress which emphasises the individual's appraisal of potential stressors as he/she interacts with his/her environment. This transactional model of school stress is sympathetic towards the philosophy of the anti-positive view point outlined previously; stress is accepted to be present in situations and events as they are perceived and constructed by the individual, just as anti-positive inquiry will focus on human experiences and situations as described by the participants or 'subjects' of those events (Maykut and Morehouse 1994). Response-based and stimulus-based models of school stress might more readily lend themselves to the positivist view point and quantitative methods; for example studies which have assigned values to school stress checklists (Garton and Pratt 1995) and those which have measured stress hormone levels in relation to school stress (Long, Ungpakorn and Harrison 1993).

However, this research does not set out to prove cause and effect of the individual's interaction with his/her environment in an objective manner; it aims to describe and discover

more about these interactions and how they are interpreted and ascribed meaning by the participants of the research. As such it is person-centred and descriptive, first person accounts, either written or transcribed feature strongly in the research rather than the objective observations of the researcher; the participants of the research are located firmly in the day to day context of their school lives, and it is from their interpretations of this that the data emerges.

However, the research does contain some quantifiable data which would normally be associated with a more normative approach; this can be explained by considering the aims of the research.

This research has five broad aims:

- ▶ to establish the existence of stress in the pupils at the school
- ▶ to discover the extent of this stress
- ▶ to discover the causes of this stress as perceived by the pupils
- ▶ to discover how this stress made the pupils feel
- ▶ to suggest ways to combat this stress

As stated previously, this research is for a purpose and seeks to foster change in the learning environment in the institute where the research has been conducted, and thus improve the quality of schooling for the pupils who attend the school. In this respect the research has much in common with action research which insists that educational research and theory must be grounded in educational practice and that teachers working in the classroom are in a much better position to do this than external researchers. Action research has its main focus in the classroom and the school and encourages teachers to become involved in their own practice (McNiff 1988).

Stephen Kemmis and Wilf Carr define action research in the following way:

'Action research is a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants (teachers, students or principles, for example) in social (including educational) situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of (a) their own social or educational practices. (b) their understanding of these practices, and (c) the situations (and institutions) in which these practices are carried out.'

(Carr and Kemmis in McNiff 1988 page 2).

The research did not begin as action research as it is not self-reflective or completed by the participants of the educational setting, but it is research for action. It sets out to discover more about stress in school; examine the factors in the school environment which create this stress and to suggest changes which could be made to alleviate this stress. It attempts to give an insight in to what actually happens in school which creates stress for pupils and to recommend what the school could do to relieve this stress.

It is perhaps now more readily agreed that there is no single 'best way' to complete educational research and approaches can be justifiably more varied. Burgess (1985) suggests that in recent years there has been an increase in the popularity of qualitative methods in educational research but emphasises the appropriateness of the method of investigation to the research problem as being more important than discussions concerning the superiority of one method over another. Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) also note a growing dissatisfaction with positivism within educational research and a slow and gradual movement towards qualitative research, on the basis that quantitative methods present a 'mechanical' and 'dehumanized view' of human beings. This view is also endorsed by Bogdan and Biklen (1992) who claim most educational researchers identify themselves more with qualitative approaches and have welcomed the changes which have occurred in

research strategies. Bell states:

'The approach adopted and the methods of data collection selected will depend on the nature of the inquiry and the type of information required.'

(Bell 1987 page 4).

This research initially seeks to find out more about school stress as perceived by those pupils experiencing it, and as such lends itself to qualitative methods. Its main concerns are with what individuals have to say about their engagement with their environment and the effects that has upon them. Semi-structured interview, personal accounts and diaries are some of the methods used to collect data for this research.

However, it was felt that some statistical evidence was appropriate at the start of the research to establish the existence of stress amongst the pupils at the school and the extent of stress in the school and thus fulfill the first two aims of the research. A questionnaire was designed to do this. The questionnaire design was also based on the notion that if the pupils perceive themselves to feel stress, then they are feeling stress, regardless of physical, psychological or social theory which might suggest otherwise. Questions were largely subjective requiring descriptive replies, with some 'factual' questions to supply background data for example: age, gender and year group. The questionnaire was flexible enough to allow the respondents to demonstrate their true feelings and to write at length about their experiences of stress if they wished to do so.

Many of the questions on the questionnaire aimed to extricate personal responses and in this respect, was also subjective. It was used as a mapping tool, and has been analysed as such with basic presentation of data mainly in terms of frequencies and percentages; the aim being to use the data to establish 'facts', as the pupils perceive them,

about stressors at school and how it feels for the pupils who perceive themselves to be stressed. The questionnaire was also used to help identify volunteers for the semi-structured interviews which followed and volunteers to supply written accounts of their experiences of stress at school. Some of the data from the questionnaire was used to provide a starting point for discussions in the semi-structured interviews; interviewees were reminded of some of the comments they had made on the questionnaire and invited to elaborate if they wished; additional comments led to deeper exploration of experiences and their interpretation by the individual's involved and triangulate some of the questionnaire data.

The 'type of information required' for this research and the 'knowledge' being sought were the perceptions and experiences of the pupils. The data is consequently subjective, descriptive and at times anecdotal, providing valid insights into the reality of school life as perceived by those personally living it. These are not experiences which can be reproduced in any simulation or experiment; the information can only be provided by the individuals themselves currently interacting with the environment they describe. This is the main reason qualitative methods were used for the bulk of this research with the questionnaire providing an authentic context in which to place the data.

The final aim of the research is met in the last chapter which explores some of the implications of this research for the school, I have also included data collected in a stress management lesson delivered to Year 11 pupils in 1995. The stress management lesson was a new initiative for the school, implemented as a result of this research. Although the focus of the stress management lesson was slightly different from the research, the data gathered in this lesson can be used to triangulate the questionnaire and interview data. The quantitative and qualitative data collected from the questionnaires and interviews supplied two different types of knowledge about school stress; descriptive and evidential. Data from

the stress management lesson provides a means of consolidating and checking the research data; adding to a broader view of school stress.

Appendix Two contains the raw written accounts and diaries kept by pupils during the first year of the research. Some written accounts included may have been collected by the researcher prior to the beginning of this research as it had often occurred to me to ask pupils to write down anything about school life that they felt was stressful for them, just from personal curiosity. This personal curiosity, and the magnitude and sensitivity of some of the personal writing I received, became the motivation for this research.

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

At the start of the research, in January 1993, the school was part of the Derbyshire Education Authority. It became Grant Maintained on September 1st. 1993. It is an 11 - 16 co-educational comprehensive day school with 850 pupils on roll in September 1993. It is six form entry with an admission level for Year Seven at 181 pupils.

The research began with the issue of questionnaires during the first week of the Spring Term, 1993. The questionnaires were filled in by six volunteers, three male and three females, in every form in every year group. In all 180 questionnaires were issued. Interviewees were identified on a voluntary basis from the questionnaires and six pupils from each year group were interviewed. Where possible an equal balance of male and females was obtained, although as I was relying on volunteers, this was not always possible. Some of these interviewees agreed to be interviewed in the following year of the research and some agreed to supply written evidence of their experiences either in the form of a

piece of descriptive or personal writing, or as a diary over a fixed period of time decided by themselves. The same procedure was followed in the second year of the research.

THE PILOT QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire was designed as a 'mapping instrument', aiming to establish the 'extent of the problem'. It was designed to be 'accessible to all'. A pilot questionnaire was conducted in the Autumn Term of 1992, prior to the start of this research which involved 40 volunteers, males and females from every year group. These volunteers were selected by myself from my own teaching groups. I chose a day of the week when I taught pupils in every year group, and simply asked the first seven or eight pupils who walked into my classroom if they would mind helping me out by filling in a questionnaire. All of them willingly complied, although some may have declined with hindsight!

Refinements were made to the questionnaire in the light of feed back from the pupils who took part in the pilot scheme. The changes made were quite superficial but thought by the pupils taking part in the pilot to give greater clarity to the questions being asked. The length of the questionnaire was criticised by some volunteers in the pilot who felt it took them too long to fill in - on average approximately twenty minutes. However, it was intended to glean as much information as possible from those filling it in and seen by the researcher as an opportunity too good to miss of building up a relatively quick and accurate picture of the extent of the problem within the school. As the researcher is also a teacher in the school a good return on the questionnaire could be expected, and again this was an opportunity too good to miss.

Despite the criticisms of the length of the questionnaire at the piloting stage it also received some praise. Favourable comments included:

'I think this questionnaire is a good idea and people should have the chance to fill it in, to get their opinions over and to make people understand how we feel.'

(Female year 10).

'I think it is a good idea to find out how much stress people go through as some people get more and more stressed and don't say anything and this is unhealthy. I think it would be worth the school looking into getting a qualified counsellor.'

(Female year 11).

'I thought this questionnaire was very well written and helped me myself to answer these questions. I hope I have helped you with this questionnaire.'

(Male year 8).

Criticisms made of the pilot questionnaire included:

'Some of the words are large and I didn't understand some of them and number 23 is hard to understand.'

(Male year 8).

'I would like to know who or what the questionnaire is for by a brief paragraph at the front'.

(Female year 10).

Three changes were made to the questionnaire after the pilot, taking on board the criticisms cited above. Question number 23 referred to the health of the respondents and asked the question :

- Do you suffer from minor complaints?

The word 'complaints' was understood to mean 'criticisms' by some respondents rather than the intended 'minor illnesses'. Two of the more amusing replies to this question were:

'Sometimes. My mates call me a wimp.'

(Male year 8).

'Sometimes. When I wear some of my clothes which I like, but other people don't.'

(Female year 8).

Another problem with this question was that a subsequent question, number 26, listed various minor illnesses and asked the respondents to tick any they suffered from 'always', 'often', 'occasionally' or 'never'. In a few cases respondents had said that they never suffered from 'minor complaints' in question 23, yet had ticked 'often' or 'occasionally' in question number 26. To further highlight the unsatisfactory nature of this question one respondent, a male in year 7, described his health as 'good', said that he 'never' suffered from 'minor complaints' yet made 13 positive claims to have experienced the minor illnesses listed in question 26 against only 3 'never' responses.

In another example, the respondent had read through all the questions before answering any of them. Consequently, many of the 'minor complaints' listed in question 26, appeared in her response to question 23.

In the final questionnaire, question 26 was removed entirely as it was considered to be misleading and possibly too suggestive; question 23 remained with space for respondents

to give their own examples of the 'minor complaints' they felt they suffered from. I decided not to change 'minor complaints' to 'minor illnesses' even though it had confused two respondents in the pilot, because having talked to volunteers in the pilot they seemed to associate 'being ill' with 'being weak', and I did not want to suggest that admitting to feeling stress was a sign of either 'weakness' or 'illness'. Despite this care, one interesting comment is worth quoting:

'Stress is worrying about things that you can't do nothing about. So if you don't worry you won't be stressed. And also never show how you feel it is a weakness.'

(Male year 11).

Another question changed in the final questionnaire was question number 25 which asked:

- ▶ What is your school attendance record like?

Choices given to respondents were 'excellent', 'very good', 'good', 'average', 'below average', 'poor' or 'very poor'. Objection to this was that it asked for a subjective assessment of attendance and implied that it is acceptable, and indeed expected, that school attendance should be anything less than 'excellent'. It also involved a 'value judgement' of what 'excellence' is; what is considered excellent for one pupil may not be considered excellent for another.

It was decided to ask respondents to estimate their record of attendance in terms of their absences, rather than using an adjective to describe it. Choices were given as follows:

► What is your school attendance like?

Never absent

Absent one or two days each year

Absent about one week each year

Absent one or two days each term

Absent one or more weeks each term

Absent more frequently

No further changes were made to the questionnaire after the pilot was completed.

The amendments were made and the second version issued to just ten volunteers for 'testing'. These volunteers had not previously filled in a questionnaire and were again selected randomly by myself from my own Tutor Group. This version received no further criticism from respondents and this version of the questionnaire was used at the start of the research in January 1993. Examples of the pilot questionnaire and its final version can be found in Appendix One.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE 1993 QUESTIONNAIRE

As stated previously, the questionnaire was issued to 180 volunteers during the first week of January 1993. The questionnaires were issued by Form Tutors on the Monday morning and collected back in by the Friday by myself. Prior to this, co-operation from Form Tutors had been elicited at Pastoral Meetings during the last few weeks of the previous term. No Form Tutor objected to either the questionnaire itself or to having to 'administer' it in Pastoral time. This can be a sensitive issue as many Form Tutors feel that their Pastoral time is 'overloaded' by administration and feel resentful of anything that they feel impinges more on this time or their good will. This feeling is especially strong in the Upper School. Tutors were again reminded about the issue of the questionnaire at a brief Staff Meeting which is a regular Monday morning feature at the School. It was stressed at this meeting how important the questionnaire was to the research and that the highest return possible was desired.

Most Form Tutors issued and collected in the questionnaire efficiently and helpfully and showed a genuine interest in the research. A few were quite cynical about the idea that pupils might feel stress and felt themselves, or teachers in general, to be more worthy and deserving subjects for such research. Two Tutors, both male, while not expressing their disapproval to me directly, registered their disinterest by issuing the questionnaire but declining to ask pupils for its return. Subsequent reminders achieved no response but a 'trawl' of their Pastoral bases proved more fruitful. Completed questionnaires were found

under layers of papers, marking, books and other disregarded notices with the excuse of 'well, you know what my lot are like!'

By the end of the second week I had secured the return of 167 questionnaires which was 92.8% of the total issued. Of the 180 questionnaires originally issued, 36 had been issued to each of five year groups. 35 were returned from year 7, 35 were returned from year 8, 32 were returned from year 9, 34 were returned from year 10 and 31 from year 11. Of these, 80 or 47.9%, were returned by males; 84 or 50.3% were returned by females and 3, or 1.8%, returned their questionnaire without stating whether they were male or female. One questionnaire of a dyslexic male pupil in year 7 had been filled in by his mother, but all responses were his own opinions. (This was confirmed by his mother who is a member of the School Governing Body.)

Of the 167 respondents, 165 agreed with the definition of stress provided on the questionnaire and 2 did not agree with it. The two who disagreed were a male in year 7 and a female in year 10. The year 7 male did not suggest an alternative definition but the year 10 female suggested:

'I think stress means when everything gets on top of you.'

Several 'riders' or additions to the definition were suggested, exclusively by female members of year 11. Perhaps this could indicate a greater confidence in completing questionnaires based on greater previous experience, more concern to fill in questionnaires well based on their own reliance on the use of questionnaires in their own academic studies or greater interest, experience and concern for the subject of the questionnaire. Indeed the

results of the research suggest the latter to be true as will be discussed in more detail later.

Examples of these further suggestions are:

'Yes. Apart from the last part about positive benefits.'

'Yes. Stress is different for different people.'

'Yes. You have to be the right sort of person to gain from stress.'

'Yes. It also makes you tired, lethargic and agitated. It can also reveal itself physically in other forms, for example: shaky hands, lack of appetite etc.'

'I agreed with the above but stress is not always caused by a situation that is dangerous. The situation just seems harmful to us. Perhaps a mental fear.'

The second question asked respondents if they had ever experienced stress. 6% said that they had 'never' felt stress; this was 10 respondents all together, 5 males and 5 females. 59.9% said that they 'occasionally' felt stress; this was 100 respondents all together, 52 males and 48 females. 29.9% said that they 'often' felt stress; this was 49 respondents all together, 20 males and 29 females. 1.8% said that they 'always' felt stress; this was 3 respondents all together, 2 males and 1 female. This meant that 91% of respondents said that they had experienced stress either 'always', 'often' or 'occasionally'. (Figure 7).

FIGURE 7

	NEVER	OCCASION'Y	OFTEN	ALWAYS
MALE	5	52	20	2
FEMALE	5	48	29	1

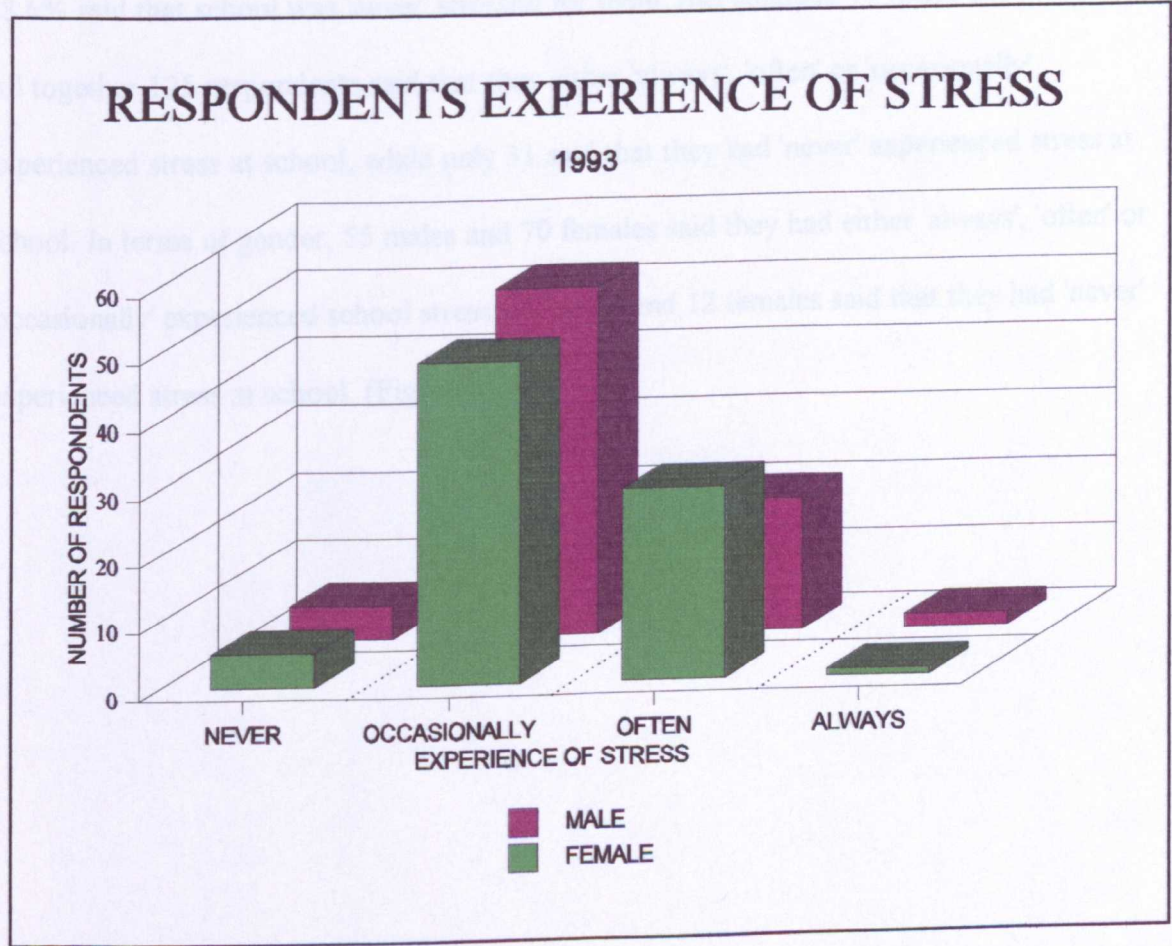


Figure 7

Question 3 asked respondents where they experienced this stress: at home, at school, with their friends or when alone. 74% said their stress was experienced at home; 74.8% said it was experienced at school; 51.5% said when they were with their friends and 50.9% said they experienced stress when they were alone.

Of those respondents who said they experienced stress at school, 3% or 5 respondents said that school was 'always' stressful for them, 3 males and 2 females. 25.7% or 43 respondents said that school was 'often' stressful for them; 16 were male and 27 female. 46.1% said school was 'occasionally' stressful; of these 36 were male and 41 female. 18.6% said that school was 'never' stressful for them; this included 19 males and 12 females. All together 125 respondents said that they either 'always', 'often' or 'occasionally' experienced stress at school, while only 31 said that they had 'never' experienced stress at school. In terms of gender, 55 males and 70 females said they had either 'always', 'often' or 'occasionally' experienced school stress; 19 males and 12 females said that they had 'never' experienced stress at school. (Figure 8).

FIGURE 8

	NEVER	OCCASION'Y	OFTEN	ALWAYS
MALE	19	36	16	3
FEMALE	12	41	27	2

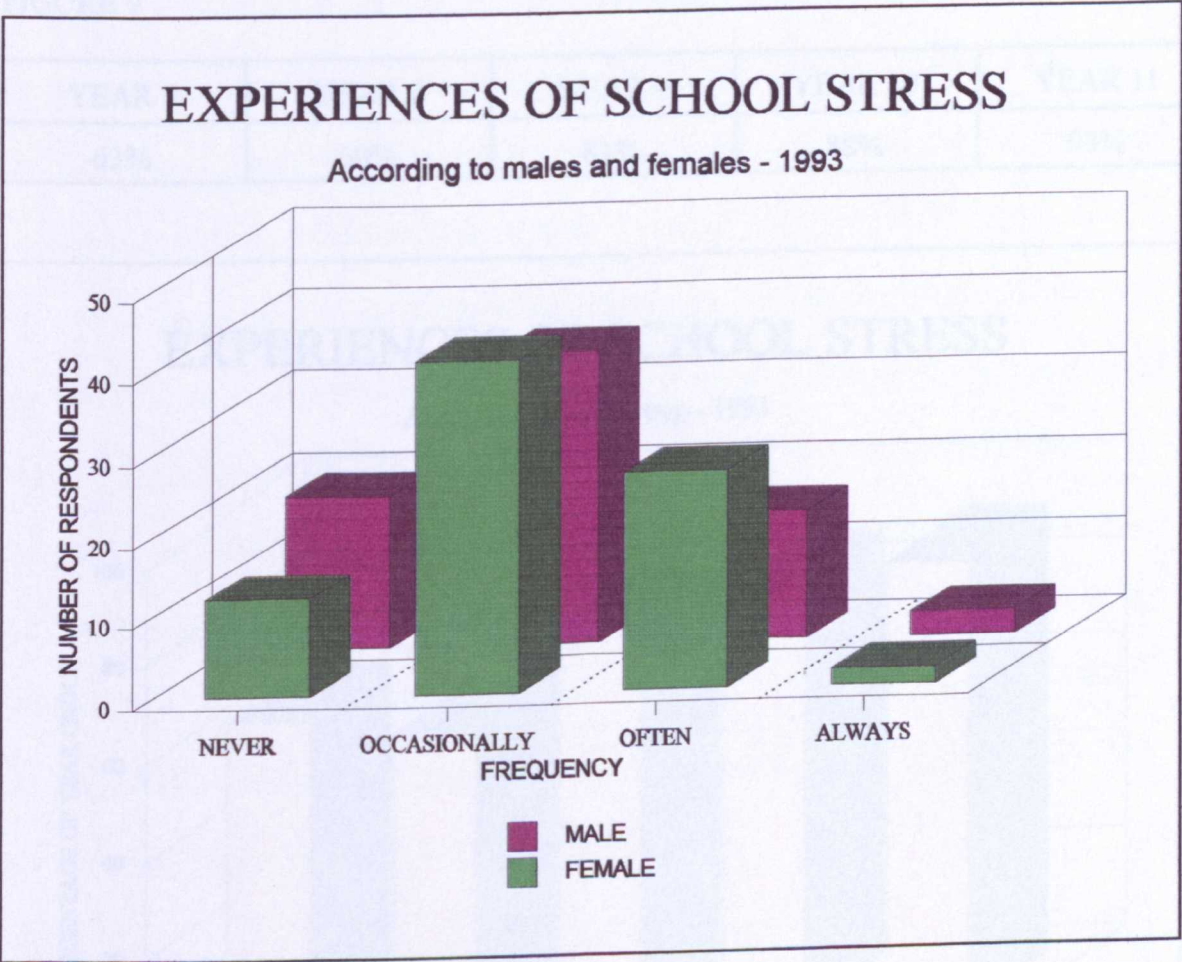


Figure 8

If these figures are considered in terms of year groups, 63% of year 7 pupils report feeling 'always', 'often' or 'occasionally' stressed at school; 60% of year 8 pupils share these experiences; 81% of year 9 report the same; 88% of year 10 and 93% of year 11 also report the same experience. (Figure 9).

FIGURE 9

YEAR 7	YEAR 8	YEAR 9	YEAR 10	YEAR 11
63%	60%	81%	88%	93%

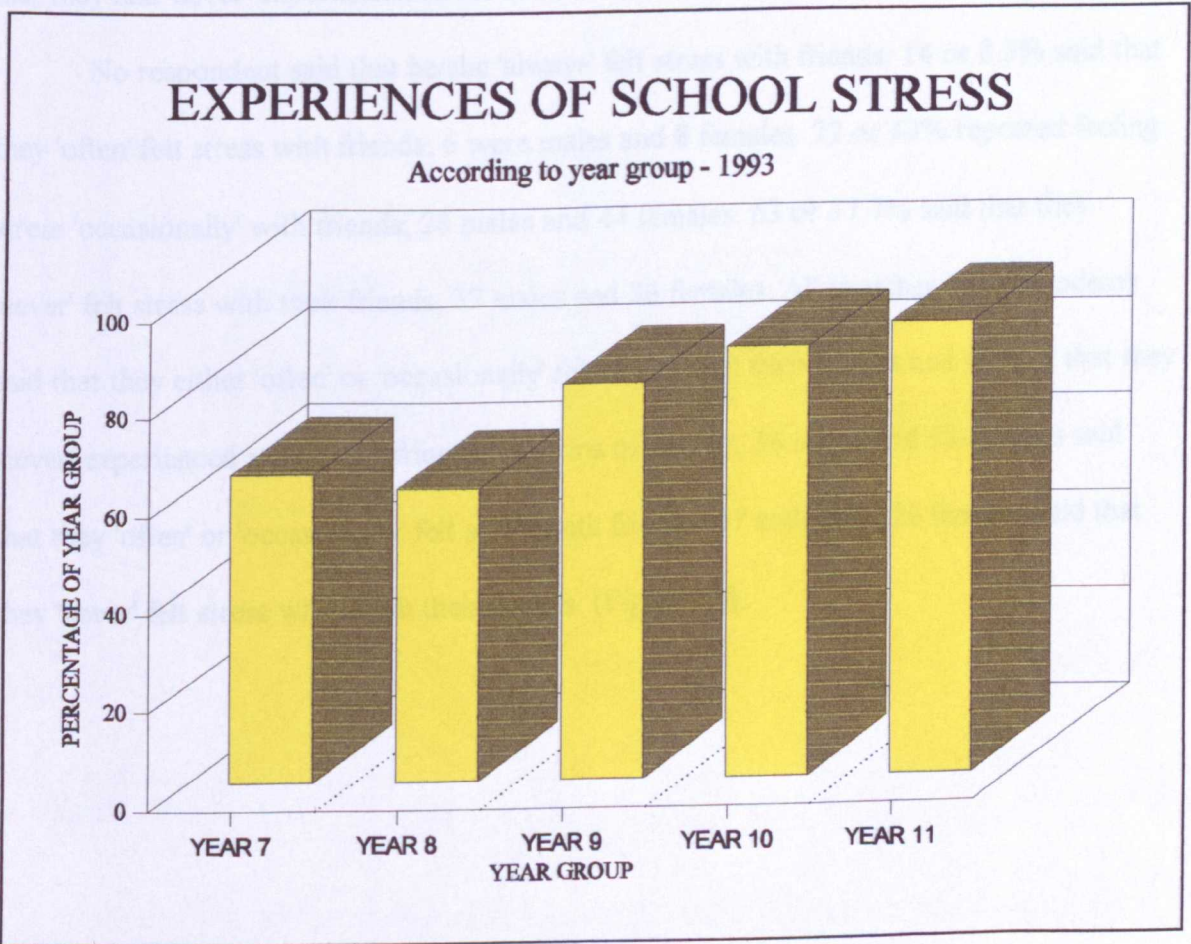


Figure 9

A slightly smaller number of respondents said that they had experienced stress at home, 74%. 1 male and 2 females, 1.8% of the sample, said that they 'always' experienced

stress at home. 11 males and 24 females, 21% of the sample, said that they 'often' experienced stress at home. 49 males and 37 females, 51.4% of the sample, said that they 'occasionally' experienced stress at home. Finally, 16 males and 14 females, 17.9% of the sample said that they 'never' experienced stress at home. A total of 124 respondents said that they either 'always', 'often' or 'occasionally' experience stress at home and only 30 said they 'never' experienced stress at home. In terms of gender, 61 males and 63 females said they have 'always', 'often' and 'occasionally' felt stress at home; 16 males and 14 females said that they had 'never' experienced stress at home.

No respondent said that he/she 'always' felt stress with friends. 14 or 8.3% said that they 'often' felt stress with friends; 6 were males and 8 females. 72 or 43% reported feeling stress 'occasionally' with friends; 28 males and 44 females. 63 or 37.7% said that they 'never' felt stress with their friends; 37 males and 26 females. All together 86 respondents said that they either 'often' or 'occasionally' felt stress with their friends and 63 said that they 'never' experienced stress with friends. In terms of gender, 34 males and 52 females said that they 'often' or 'occasionally' felt stress with friends; 37 males and 26 females said that they 'never' felt stress when with their friends. (Figure 10).

FIGURE 10

	NEVER	OCCASION'Y	OFTEN	ALWAYS
HOME	14	37	24	2
SCHOOL	12	41	27	2
FRIENDS	26	44	8	0
ALONE	28	31	15	3

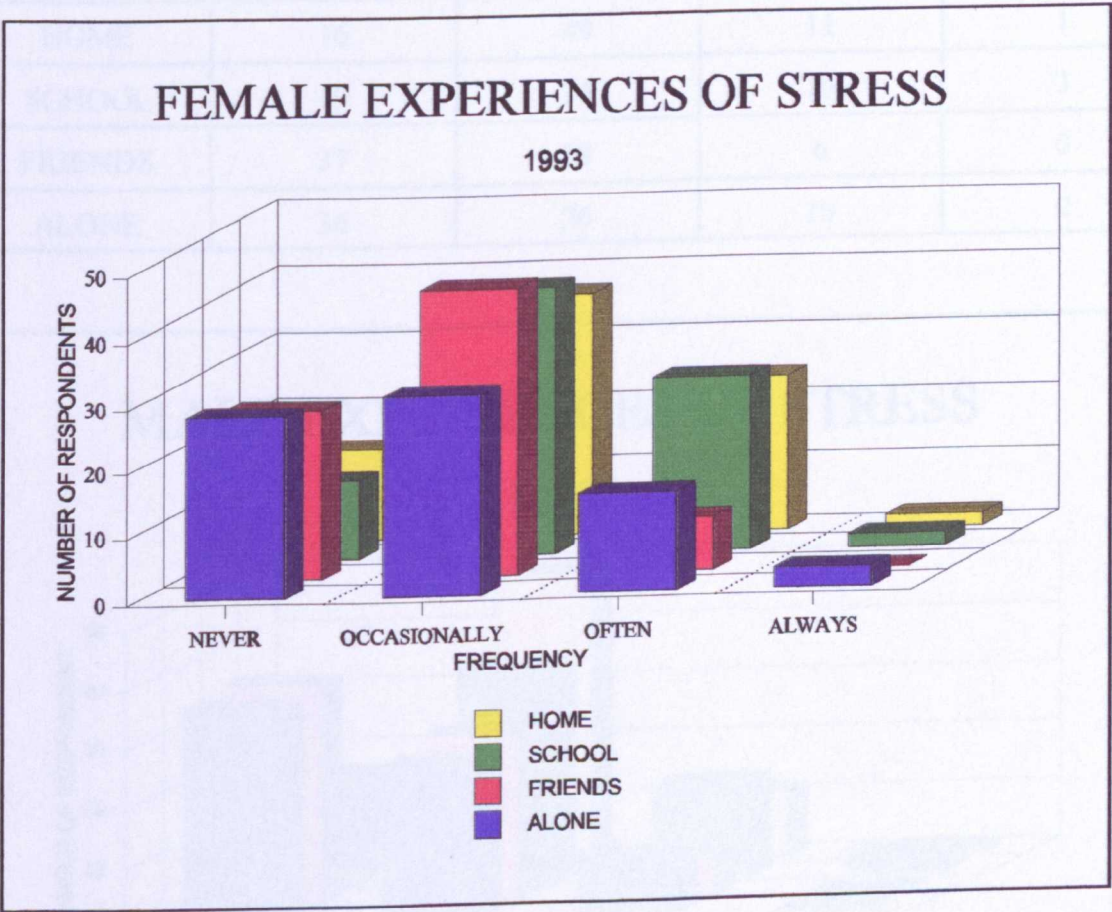


Figure 10

3, or 1.7%, of the sample, all female, said that they 'always' felt stress when alone. 25, or 20%, of the sample said that they 'often' experienced stress when alone; 10 males and 15 females. 57, or 34.1% of the sample said that they 'occasionally' felt stress when alone; 26 males and 31 females. 64, or 38.3%, of the sample said that they 'never' experienced stress when alone. All together 85 respondents, 50.8% of the sample said that they either

'always', 'often' or 'occasionally' felt stress when alone and 64, or 38.3%, of the sample said that they 'never' experienced this. In terms of gender, 36 males and 49 females feel stress 'always', 'often' or 'never' when alone; 36 males and 28 females 'never' experience this. (Figure 11).

FIGURE 11

	NEVER	OCCASION'Y	OFTEN	ALWAYS
HOME	16	49	11	1
SCHOOL	19	36	16	3
FRIENDS	37	28	6	0
ALONE	36	26	10	0

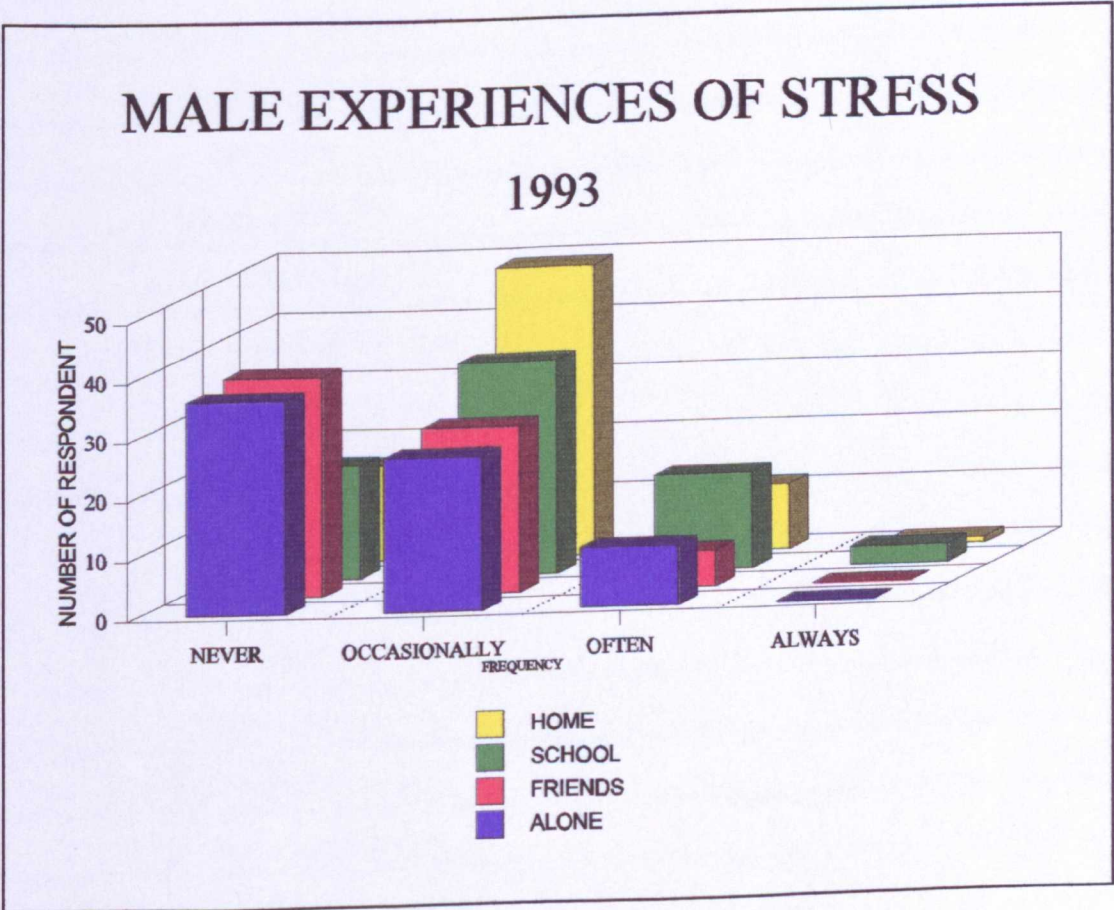


Figure 11

The next three questions in the questionnaire concentrated more specifically on 'school stress' as perceived by the respondents. They aim to elicit more information as to the situations which are perceived as stressful, and the feelings and emotions these situations create for pupils. The results are listed according to year groups; the situations are described first, and the pupils' own words have been used throughout.

***SITUATIONS YEAR 7 PUPILS PERCEIVE AS STRESSFUL IN
SCHOOL AND THE NUMBER OF TIMES THEY WERE
MENTIONED***

Tests and exams	5
New work / not understanding work	4
Being bullied or threatened	4
Competitive sports / competitions	3
Being told off / getting into trouble	3
When homework hasn't been done	3
Music lessons	2
When teachers get cross	2
When friends leave you out	1
Detention	1
Losing a friend	1
Being called names	1
Speaking in front of the class	1
Fighting and being blamed	1
When I've lost something	1
When friends are not nice	1
Falling out with brothers and sisters	1
Maths	1
Horse riding	1
Playing on the computer	1
When time is running out	1

***FEELINGS YEAR 7 PUPILS ASSOCIATE WITH THESE
SITUATIONS AND THE NUMBER OF TIMES THEY WERE
MENTIONED***

Nervous	8
Mad / angry	7
Worried	6
Frustrated	4
Unhappy	3
Tired	3
Frightened	3
Uncomfortable	3
Want to be alone	2
Sick	2
Tense	2
Panic	2
Helpless	1
Lonely	1
Sad	1
Violent	1
Hot	1
Snappy	1
Upset	1
Cold	1
Bored	1
Fed-up	1
Tearful	1
Distressed	1

Down	1
Horrible	1
Out of place	1
Uncared for	1

***SITUATIONS YEAR 8 PUPILS PERCEIVE AS STRESSFUL IN
SCHOOL AND THE NUMBER OF TIMES THEY WERE
MENTIONED***

Tests and exams	7
When friends fall out	5
Being nagged by teachers / told off	3
When you cannot do the work set	3
Bullying	3
Teachers asking questions	2
Exams at short notice / no revision time	2
When the whole class is told off	2
Being told off when you didn't do it	2
Rushing to finish work	1
When no one likes me	1
P.E.	1
Breaking friends / falling out	1
Being a bully	1
Being rejected by girlfriend / boyfriend	1
Stealing	1
When teachers have a bad day	1
Too much homework	1
Family problems / worrying about money	1
Being asked to compete	1

***FEELINGS YEAR 8 PUPILS ASSOCIATE WITH THESE
SITUATIONS AND THE NUMBER OF TIMES THEY WERE
MENTIONED***

Angry	6
Worried	6
Nervous	6
Want to be alone	3
Aggressive	2
As if no one cares	2
Ratty / impatient	2
Depressed	2
Unhappy	2
Upset	2
Mad	2
Browned-off	2
Panic	1
Anxious	1
Down	1
As if the World's against me	1
Not worth living	1
Cannot concentrate	1
Hot	1
Sick	1
Bad	1
Want to give up	1
Snappy	1
Guilty	1

Unwanted	1
Lonely	1
Tired	1
Left out	1
Tearful	1
Low	1
Not very good inside	1
Impatient	1

***SITUATIONS YEAR 9 PUPILS PERCEIVE AS STRESSFUL AT
SCHOOL AND THE NUMBER OF TIMES THEY WERE
MENTIONED***

Exams and tests	12
Being in trouble with teachers	6
Too much homework	4
Deadlines	3
Being blamed when you're innocent	3
Being threatened	3
Bullying	2
Unable to do the work set	2
Not being liked	2
French lessons	2
Being in love	1
Teachers not believing you	1
Fighting	1
Teachers shouting for no reason	1
Problems at home	1
Problems with friends	1
Cross country running	1
Sports Day	1
Being asked questions by a teacher	1
Detention	1
Being picked on	1
Being in the playground	1
Changing years	1
Competitions	1

Speaking out in the class	1
---------------------------	---

***FEELINGS YEAR 9 PUPILS ASSOCIATE WITH THESE
SITUATIONS AND THE NUMBER OF TIMES THEY WERE
MENTIONED***

Worried	7
Angry	7
Tense / uptight	6
Nervous	6
Depressed	4
Annoyed	3
Tearful	3
Fed-up	3
Sad	3
Screaming / shouting	2
Kicking / hitting	2
Wound-up / under pressure	2
Confused	1
Hopeless	1
Unhappy	1
Bad-tempered	1
Anxious	1
Ignorant	1
Tired	1
Snappy	1
Want to be alone	1
Uncomfortable	1
Down in the dumps	1
Angry with family	1

Insecure	1
Lonely	1
Unable to cope	1
Ill	1
Bored	1

***SITUATIONS YEAR 10 PUPILS PERCEIVE AS STRESSFUL
AT SCHOOL AND THE NUMBER OF TIMES THEY WERE
MENTIONED***

Tests and exams	11
Too much homework	7
Deadlines	7
Overload of coursework	6
Homework	5
Not understanding work	5
Bullying	4
Problems with girlfriends / boyfriends	3
Arguing with friends	3
Being in trouble / punishments	2
Competition (academic) with peers	2
Competition (academic) with siblings	1
Competition (sport) with peers	1
Study	1
Falling out	1
Family arguments	1
Financial problems	1
Petty arguments and rumour	1
Changing classes	1
Fights	1
Talking in front of the class	1
Being asked a question by a teacher	1
Revising	1
Being left out of a conversation	1

Having a clever friend	1
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***FEELINGS YEAR 10 PUPILS ASSOCIATE WITH THESE
SITUATIONS AND THE NUMBER OF TIMES THEY WERE
MENTIONED***

Nervous	6
Angry	5
Depressed	5
Worried	4
Tense	3
Upset	3
Tearful	3
Anxious	3
Sense of underachievement	3
Need to talk	2
Very low	2
Lonely	2
Guilty	2
Uncomfortable	2
Under pressure	2
Short tempered	2
Run down	1
Heavy	1
Mad	1
Hot	1
Tired	1
Bored	1
Fed-up	1
Pushed	1

Impatient	1
Panic	1
No one cares	1
Unable to keep still	1
Angry with family	1
Annoyed	1
No one can help	1
The whole World's against me	1
Want to be alone	1
Tight	1
Wound-up	1

***SITUATIONS YEAR 11 PUPILS PERCEIVE AS STRESSFUL
AT SCHOOL AND THE NUMBER OF TIMES THEY WERE
MENTIONED***

Deadlines	18
Test, exams and results	13
Lots of coursework all at once	4
Homework	4
Too much work	3
Pressure of time	2
Being bullied	2
Problems with friendships / relationships	2
Crucial sporting matches / competitions	2
Interviews	1
Forgetting something	1
Parental pressure / nagging	1
Teachers humiliating you	1
Pushing in the corridors	1
Choosing a career	1
People depending on me	1
Insecurity	1
No solutions to situations	1
Other people's expectations	1
Revision	1
Letting people down	1
Balancing school life and social life	1

***FEELINGS YEAR 11 PUPILS ASSOCIATE WITH THESE
SITUATIONS AND THE NUMBER OF TIMES THEY WERE
MENTIONED***

Angry	11
Pressured	7
Nervous	7
Tired	7
Irritable / snappy	6
Depressed	6
Anxious	4
Tense	4
Upset	4
Tearful	3
Frustrated	3
Worried	3
Confused	3
Sick	2
Hot	2
Agitated	2
Moody	2
Nasty	1
Bottled-up	1
Annoyed	1
Mardy	1
Wound-up	1
Stupid	1
Very strong	1

Run down	1
Trapped	1
Cross	1
Self-conscious	1
Embarrassed	1
Bad tempered	1
Argumentative	1
Edgy	1
Hopeless	1
Ratty	1
Irritable	1
Lonely	1
Scared	1
Flustered	1
Alone	1
Unsure	1
Fed-up	1
Mad at myself	1
Unable to concentrate	1
Frightened	1
Sense of underachievement	1
Weak	1

In each year group it was possible to categorise the perceived stressors and the feelings described by pupils. Stressors fell into three main groups: conflicts in relationships with peers, with teachers or in the family/home; 'curriculum generated' stressors associated with general work load or subject specific problems and a miscellaneous category of 'every day life stressors'.

Feelings described could be loosely categorised into six main groups: feelings related to a negative state of being angry, anxious or unhappy; feelings describing a physical 'symptom' of stress; feelings related to a state of boredom and a group of miscellaneous comments relating to personal feelings for example, 'as if the whole World's against me' and 'as if no one cares'.

The following pie charts show how frequently the categories of stressors identified were mentioned by each year group.

FIGURE 12

Relationships with peers	9
Relationships with teachers	7
Relationships with family members	1
Curriculum generated stressors	19
Every day life stressors	2

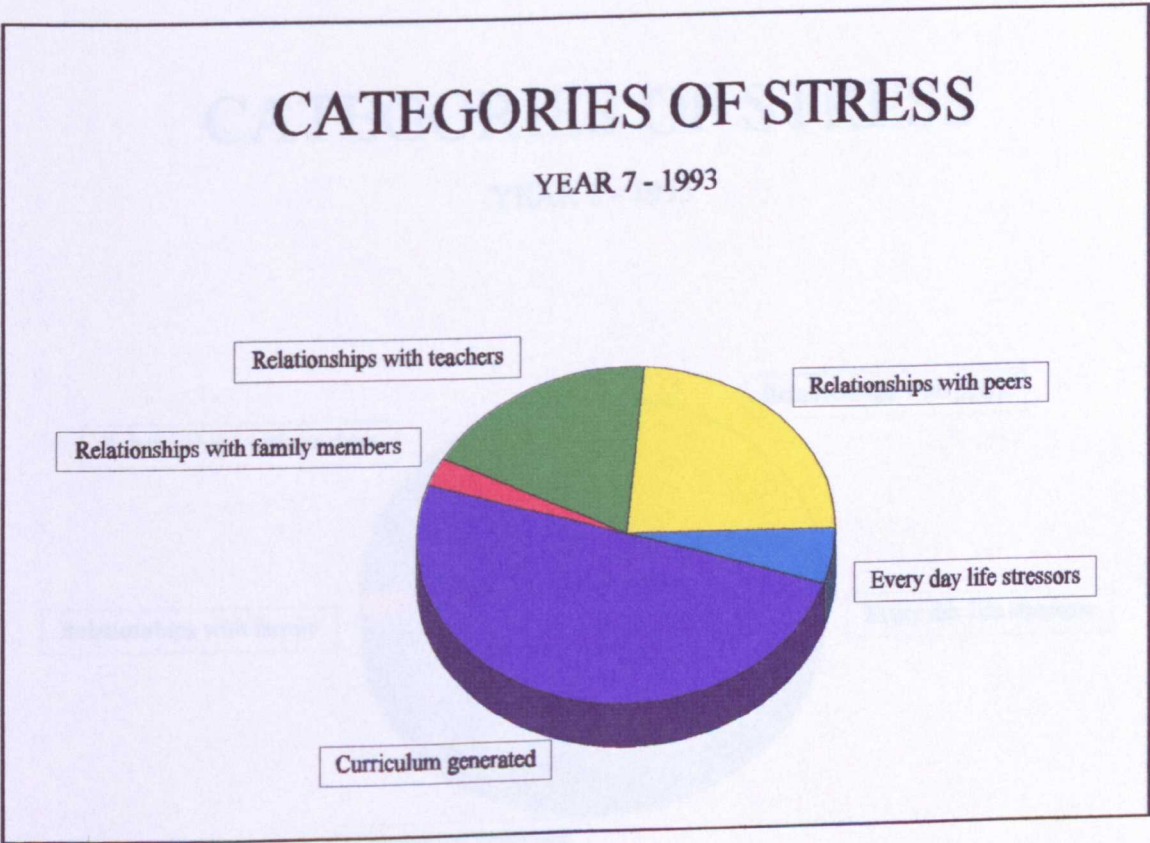


Figure 12

FIGURE 13

Relationships with peers	11
Relationships with teachers	8
Relationships with family members	1
Curriculum generated stressors	17
Every day life stressors	1

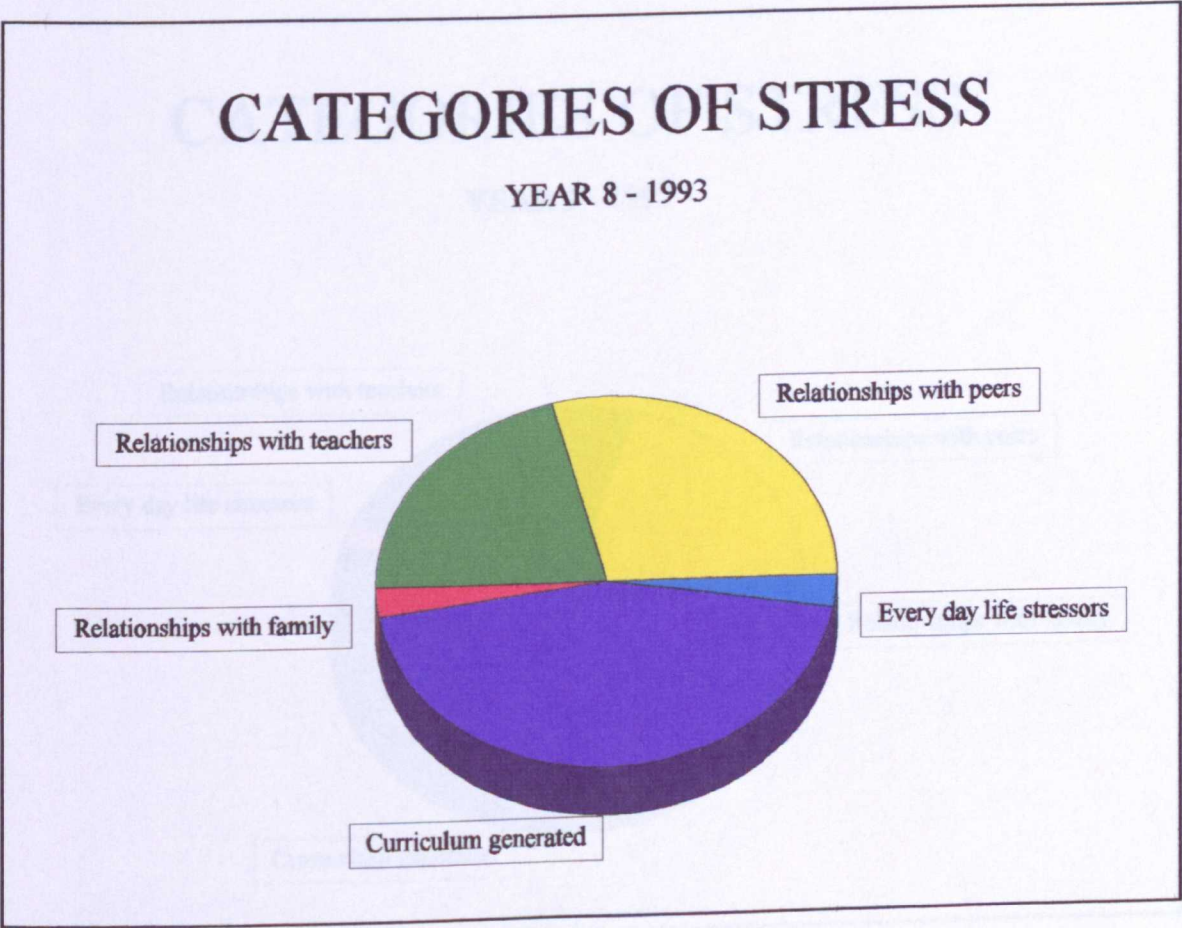


Figure 13

FIGURE 14

Relationships with peers	11
Relationships with teachers	12
Relationships with family members	1
Curriculum generated stressors	28
Every day life stressors	1

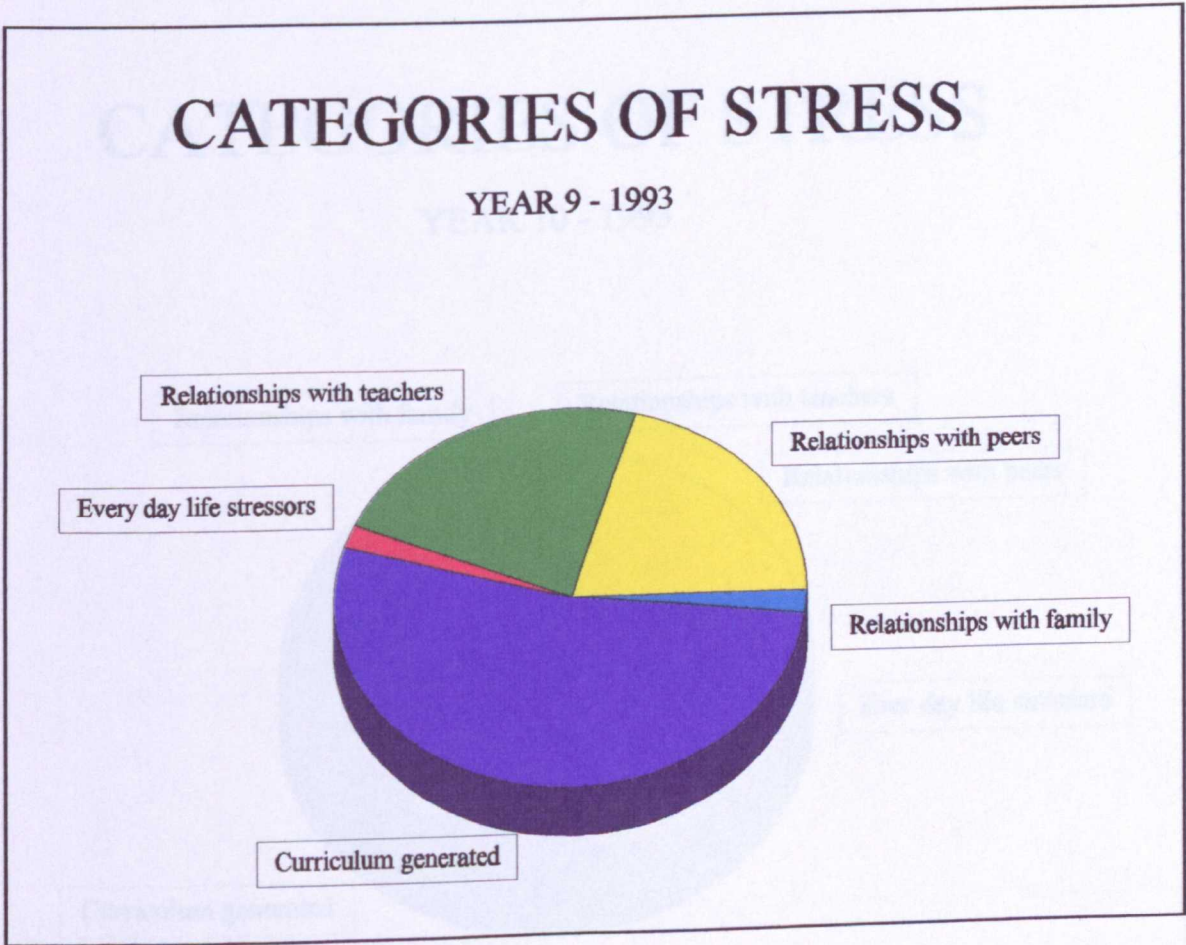


Figure 14

FIGURE 15

Relationships with peers	16
Relationships with teachers	2
Relationships with family members	3
Curriculum generated stressors	46
Every day life stressors	2

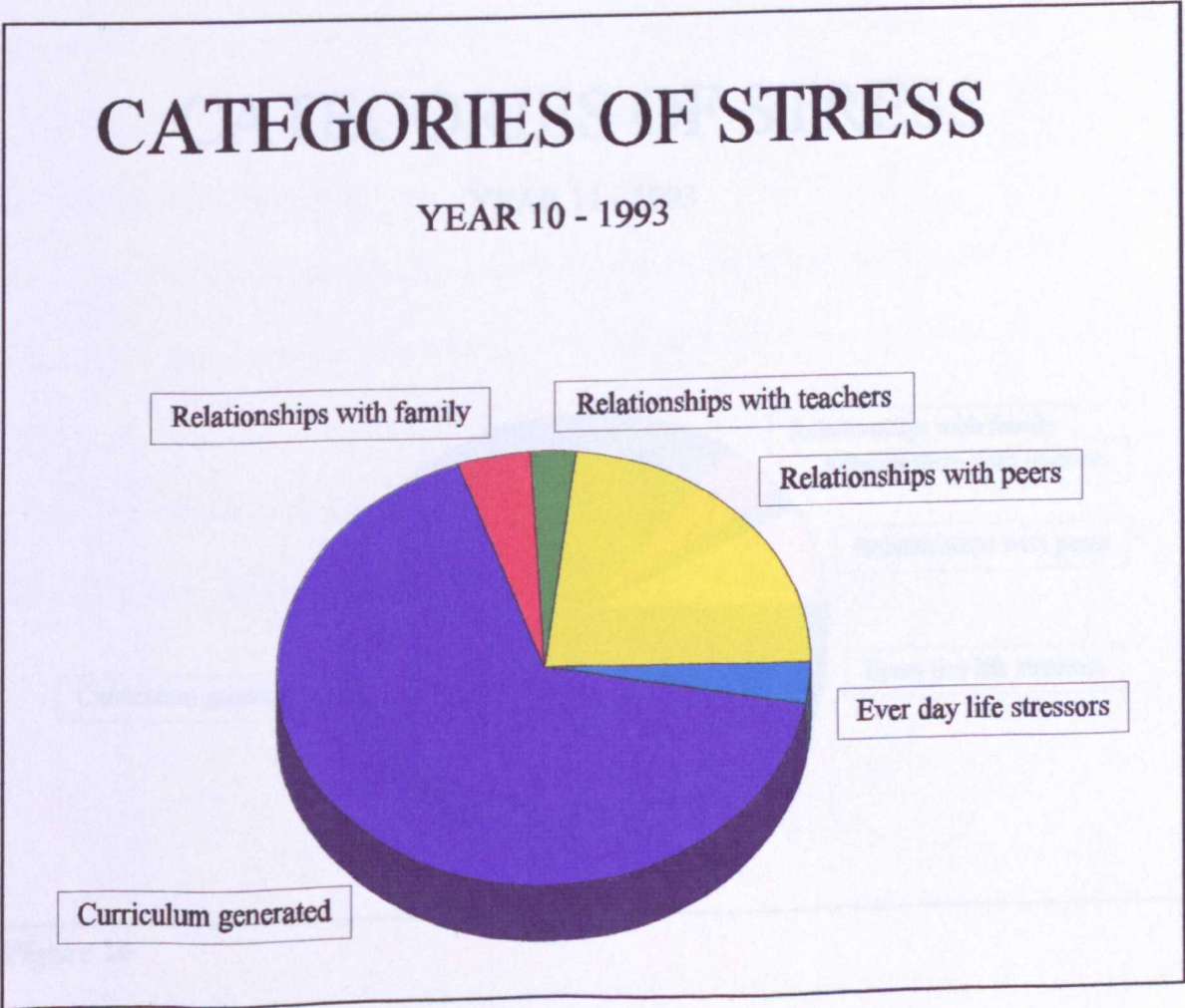


Figure 15

FIGURE 16

Relationships with peers	5
Relationships with teachers	1
Relationships with family members	3
Curriculum generated stressors	48
Every day life stressors	4

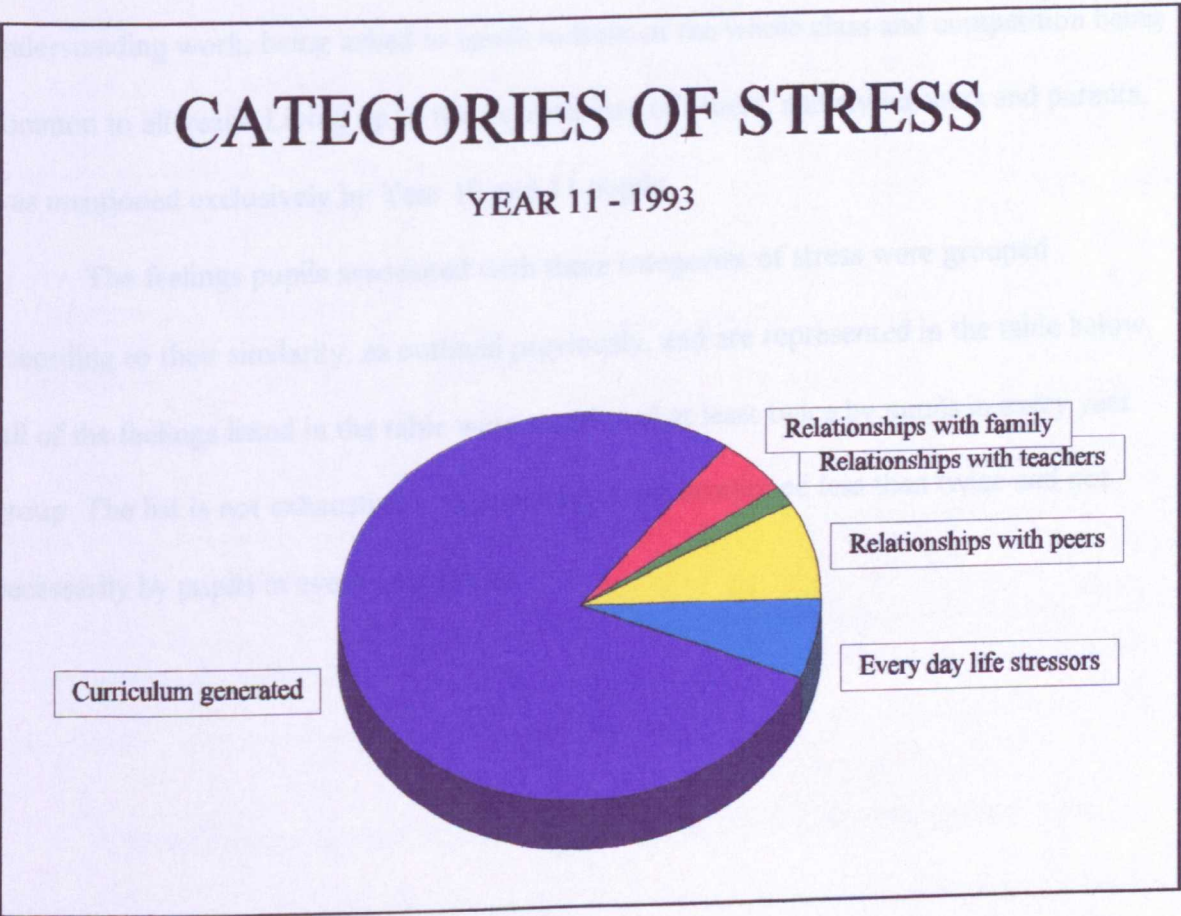


Figure 16

References to the categories relating to relationships and every day life stressors remain fairly constant in all years while the category relating to curriculum generated stressors rises consistently and dramatically over the five years the pupils are at school. This correlates closely to the gradual increase of school stress over the year groups shown in Figure 9. The type of curriculum generated stress described by pupils was very similar in every year group with exams and tests, too much homework/coursework, not understanding work, being asked to speak in front of the whole class and competition being common to all years. Living up to the expectations of others, namely teachers and parents, was mentioned exclusively by Year 10 and 11 pupils.

The feelings pupils associated with these categories of stress were grouped according to their similarity, as outlined previously, and are represented in the table below. All of the feelings listed in the table were mentioned at least twice by pupils in every year group. The list is not exhaustive; other feelings were mentioned less than twice and not necessarily by pupils in every year group.

FEELINGS MENTIONED GROUPED ACCORDING TO SIMILARITY

A	B	C	D	E	F
Anger	Anxiety	Unhappy	Boredom	Physical	Personal
snappy	tense	down	fed up	cold	no one cares
upset	nervous	lonely	frustrated	hot	not worth it
mad	worried	helpless	brownd off	tired	out of place
ratty	distressed	tearful		sick	want to give up
impatient	frightened	low		bad	guilty
aggressive	panic	depressed		ill	unable to concentrate
violent	uptight	left out		weak	the World's against me
wound up	pressured	unwanted		run down	want to be alone
agitated	discomfort	sad			unable to cope

Feelings relating to the categories named anger, anxiety and unhappiness were mentioned most frequently in all year groups. The frequency of mention for feelings relating to anger remained fairly stable in the first four years of school and then doubled in mention in year eleven. This was also true of the mention of feelings relating to anxiety in the first four years with a significant increase in year 11. A similar but less striking pattern is shown with the mention of feelings relating to unhappiness. More 'physical symptoms' were mentioned by pupils in year eleven. Feelings relating to boredom remained consistently low in all year groups. Figure 17 illustrates this.

The increasing mention of the feelings relating to anger, anxiety and unhappiness through the year groups, correlates with the increasing number of pupils reporting experiencing school stress through the year groups. These pupils cite curriculum generated stressors to be their main source of school stress. It is the curriculum generated stressors which are causing their anger, anxiety and unhappiness; the main symptoms of their school stress.

**THE NUMBER OF TIMES EACH CATEGORY OF FEELING
WAS MENTIONED ACCORDING TO YEAR GROUP**

FIGURE 17

	YEAR 7	YEAR 8	YEAR 9	YEAR 10	YEAR 11
ANGER	10	13	15	14	29
ANXIOUS	22	14	22	24	37
UNHAPPY	8	10	11	12	15
BORED	6	2	4	2	4
PHYSICAL	7	4	6	3	13
PERSONAL	5	11	3	12	7

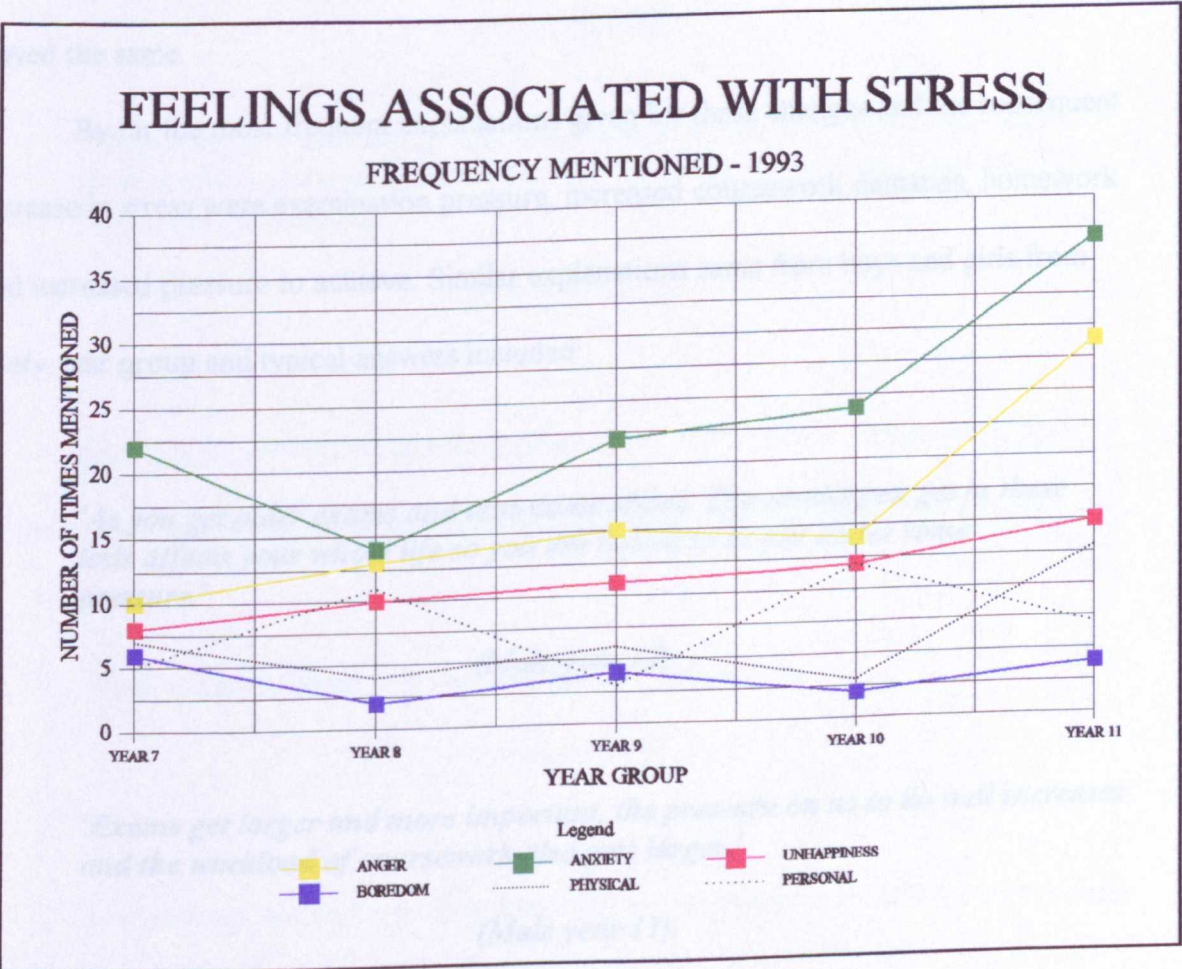


Figure 17

The next five questions aimed to discover the extent of school stress as perceived by the questionnaire's respondents. 19.7% believed that 'all' pupils feel stressed at some point in their school careers; 26.3% believed that 'many' pupils experience stress; 31.7% believed that 'quite a lot' of pupils experience stress in their school lives; 17.9% replied that 'some' experience stress and 2.3% estimated 'a few'. No pupil seems to escape experiencing stress at school, while 97.9% of pupils experience it to varying degrees. Nearly all respondents considered boys and girls to experience equal amounts of stress. 55% thought girls experienced more stress, 54% thought that boys experienced more. This stress was perceived as being developmental with 74.8% of respondents believing that stress increases as pupils get older, 10% believing it to remain the same and 8.9% believing it to decrease. 56% thought that the 'stressors' changed as pupils matured while 38% thought that they stayed the same.

By far the most frequent explanations given for these changes and the subsequent increase in stress were examination pressure, increased coursework demands, homework and increased pressure to achieve. Similar explanations came from boys and girls from every year group and typical answers included:

'As you get older exams and tests come about. The results you get in these tests affects your whole life so you are bound to be put under some pressure.'

(Male year 11).

'Exams get larger and more important, the pressure on us to do well increases and the workload of coursework also gets larger.'

(Male year 11).

'As you get older situations change and your school work load increases somewhat and a lot more pressure is put in your own hands. When you come to the 10th. and 11th. years you are attacked with last minute pieces of work that will up your final grade. The 11th. year is the worst - coming up to your final exams.'

(Female year 11).

'I felt stressed when I first started school. So many things to remember. As I get older I think I will feel more stressed about work, learn it and remembering it. Trying hard to get good marks.'

(Female year 7).

'As we get older we have to start thinking about what we are going to do at 16: leave school, go to college etc. as well as thinking about our GCSE's. As we get older the things that cause us stress are more important to the future of our lives so we suffer from stress.'

(Male year 10).

'They start with little things like too much homework, friends - especially girlfriends/ boyfriends. Later it turns to worrying about what exam results they'll get etc (studies).'

(Female year 8).

Less typical answers cited relationships, home environment and growing up generally as being the cause of increased and changing stress at school. For example:

'They might be stress at home and you can't keep it in.'

(Male year 8).

'Growing up emotionally. You handle it in a different way. Home environment.'

(Male year 10).

'It is not always to do directly with school. Exams are very stressing but you also seem to argue more and more.'

(Male year 11).

'When you are about 12 it is just bullying, when you get older it is when you smoke and when you are pregnant.'

(Male year 7).

The next group of questions asked respondents how they dealt with their stress and if they knew of ways they could help themselves. Most respondents gave examples of how they helped themselves deal with stress, the most common strategy being to talk: best friends, boyfriends/ girlfriends and Mums were the most popular choices of people to talk to. A variety of other strategies were given the most frequent of which are listed after

STRATEGIES FOR COPING

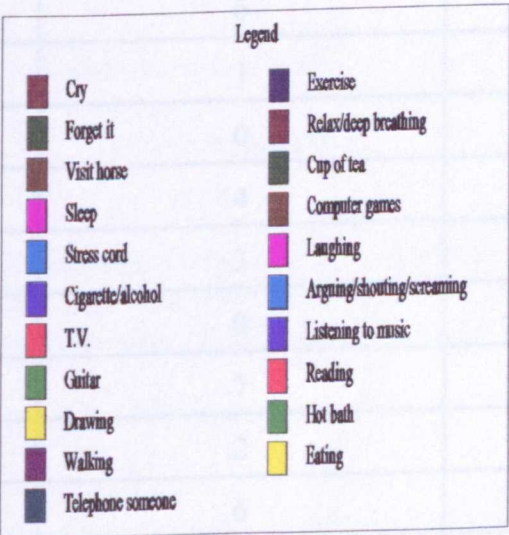
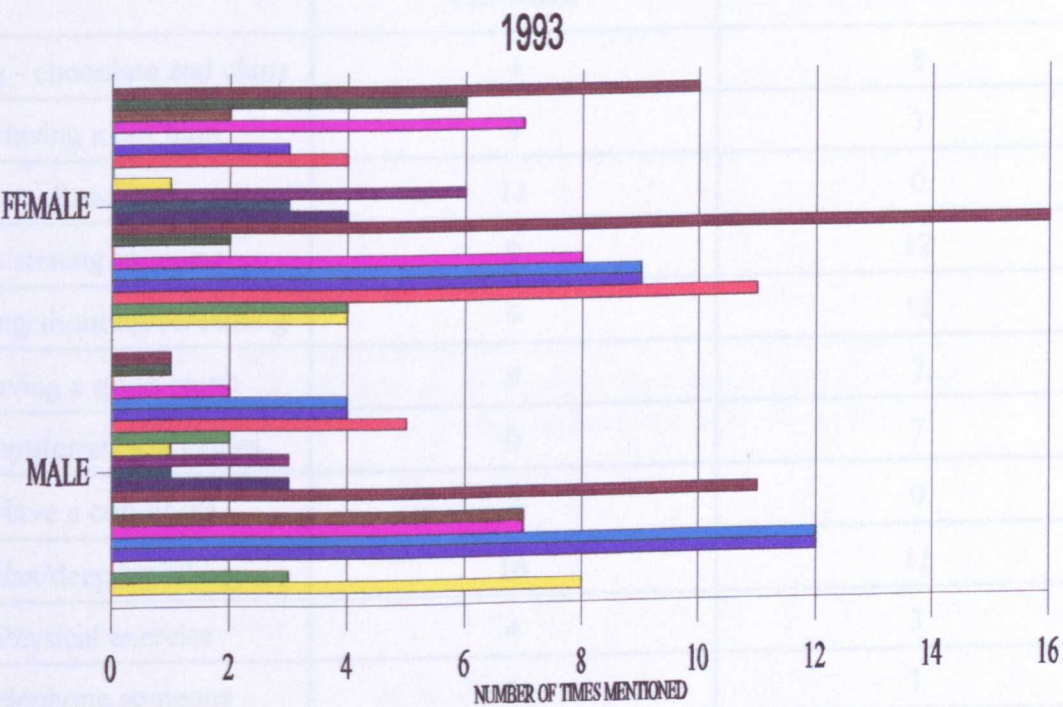


Figure 18

Figure 18

MOST FREQUENTLY MENTIONED STRATEGIES FOR COPING

	FEMALE	MALE
Eating - chocolate and chips	4	8
Having a hot bath	4	3
Reading	11	0
Listening to music	9	12
Arguing/shouting/screaming	9	12
Having a good laugh	8	7
Computer/arcade games	0	7
Have a cup of tea	2	0
Relax/deep breathing	16	11
Physical exercise	4	3
Telephone someone	3	1
Walking	6	3
Drawing	1	1
Playing guitar	0	2
Watch T. V.	4	5
Have a cigarette/drink	3	4
Stress ball/cord/sponge	0	4
Sleep	7	2
Visit horse	2	0
Forget it/ignore it	6	1
Cry	10	1

These strategies came from boys and girls in every year group. Very few respondents suggested strategies that they knew of but did not try. One female in year 10 suggested yoga or meditation; one year 10 male suggested smoking, taking drugs or playing truant from school but emphasised that he had not tried any of these things. One year 8 male said it would help to be more involved and to join in with more activities. Some answers to these questions were remarkably honest, sensitive and showed a great deal of self-awareness. For example:

'I get angry and I take my feelings out on objects ie. I might slam my fist on my desk or kick doors shut, or on a person by arguing with them and getting mad with them. I do not do this on purpose, it just happens.'

(Male year 10).

'I cry - all of the time.'

(Female year 10).

'Shout. Shut myself in a dark room and sob!'

(Female year 10).

'I go and run for hours on end. Go to see a close friend and we talk. Sometimes I don't come back at all. I find that being with my friends calms me down. I sometimes do some very strange things when I can't get away!'

(Male year 11).

'I start acting out a conversation which I hope will happen quite soon. If I am in bed at the time, (mostly) I talk to the pillow. (Please don't tell anyone.) If I knew anything else I would try it out.'

(Female year 8).

'The only thing is for the thing that is causing the stress to change.'

(Female year 7).

'When I feel stressed it is hard to cope with I try and make myself feel better, if I try to look at similar situations that I have experienced before this gives me confidence and sometimes makes me feel better.'

(Female year 11).

51.4% of respondents said that they had noticed their friends suffering from stress while 45.5% said that they had not noticed this. Females seem to notice this more with 59% of those observing stress in their friends being female and 41% being male. The main sources of identifying stress in friends were dominated by changes in mood, arguing/falling out, looking sad or depressed or talking about the cause of stress or the feelings involved. 54% of respondents said they talked to their friends about how they feel, 39.5% said they did not. Of these 64% were female and 37% male. 60.4% said that their friends talked to them about their feelings and 34.7% said that this never happened. Again this was more common among females with 64% saying that their friends talked to them and only 36% of males saying that this happened.

Only 29.9% of respondents said that they had gone to an adult for advice when they felt stress and 65.9% said they had never done this. Females were more likely to do this; 69% said that they had talked to an adult but only 31% of males said they had done this. Adults most frequently consulted were Mums and Dads, older siblings, older boyfriends, teachers, an Aunt, a Grandmother, in one case a doctor and one respondent had telephoned 'Childline' (male).

53.3% thought schools should be doing more to help pupils suffering from stress and 39.5% thought that this was unnecessary. Suggestions included more sympathetic

teachers, a school counsellor or someone to 'go to', less work, relaxation/yoga classes and a shorter school day. The most constructive and thoughtful suggestions came predominately from female members of Year 10 and 11:

'If a pupil is suffering from stress their teacher has to be more aware and be prepared to talk to their pupil in confidence, to see what is causing the stress. Even if the teacher cannot help with the situation, they could probably give their pupil some advice.'

(Female Year 10).

'I think there should be a private room, where people who are suffering from stress or any other situation can go and talk to a teacher, or a group of people about their problems, and it's not allowed to go any further than that room.'

(Female Year 11).

'You could offer like a counselling system where pupils could express their feelings of stress and a counsellor could help them over the problem, relate to the problem or live with the problem.'

(Female Year 11).

'Raise awareness, have closer Faculty co-ordination when setting coursework so that we don't get 5 assignments all at once! Although Faculties claim to co-operate, this does not really effect us! It doesn't reach us.'

(Male Year 11).

The final questions asked the respondents to assess their own health. 94% of respondents described their health as either 'very good', 'good' or 'average'. Only 6% said that their health was 'below average'. 25% said that they 'never' suffered from minor illnesses; 5% said that they 'frequently' suffered from minor illnesses; 48% said that this happened 'sometimes' and 12% said that this 'seldom' happened to them.

The types of 'minor illnesses' described included: migraine/headaches, stomach ache, period pains, spots, colds/flu/coughs, allergies, asthma, eczema, aches, tiredness, backache, hay fever, butterflies in the stomach and 'thought inspections' (throat infections!).

Most respondents reported a good attendance record at school with only 7% describing an attendance pattern of one or more weeks absence each term or more frequently; 85% reported an absence rate of between one or two days each year to one or two days absence each term and 8% said that they were never absent.

Finally, the last page of the questionnaire left room for pupils to make their own additional statements either about their experiences of stress, or about the questionnaire itself. Many pupils made helpful comments, a selection of which appear below:

'I enjoyed filling in this questionnaire. You don't usually get a chance, at our age, to express the stress we feel. You usually relate stress with adults. Not many people realise that children / teenagers suffer stress also. Filling in a questionnaire, like this, about stress, could also be used as a way in which children/ teenagers could overcome their school related stress.'

(Female year 11).

'Although I've no idea what, I think something should be done about stress. Whenever I am stressed I take it out on someone, mostly my brother, and I get told off for it. Other people get stressed (I find) because their parents are split up. I feel sorry for them because it is their parents who are the problem, they have no one to help. This leads to problems at school.'

(Female year 8).

'I'm glad to see that someone is concerned about stress because I feel that there are a lot of people who experience stress and sometimes need help to get through it.'

(Male year 11).

'It wastes an awful lot of paper!'

(Female Year 9).

Respondents were asked if they would be prepared to be interviewed, at a later date, about some of their experiences of stress. Year 11 pupils were the most enthusiastic volunteers with 14 pupils agreeing to be interviewed; 9 pupils from Year 10 volunteered; 8 pupils from Year 9; 7 pupils from Year 8 and 7 also from Year 7. From these volunteers 4 pupils, 2 male and 2 female, were selected from each year group to be interviewed, and the others were approached to consider recording written 'statements' of their experiences.

It is unlikely that my volunteers represent a true 'cross - section' of the pupils in the school and this has been taken on board as a possible problem by the researcher. They are likely to be those pupils who have volunteered because they like me and wanted to do something to help me; or they may be pupils with extreme views on the subject of stress or who feel themselves to be particularly affected by stress in school and therefore good 'examples' for the research.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE 1993 INTERVIEWS

The interviewees were selected from volunteers, in every year group, who said that they had either 'occasionally', 'often' or 'always' experienced stress in school when answering the questionnaire. They were all interviewed on the school premises during March to July 1993. There were 10 male and 11 female interviewees: one male and one female from year 7; one male and two females from year 8; two males and two females from year 9; three males and three females from both year 10 and year 11.

The interviews were semi-structured; each volunteer was asked the same 12 basic questions but their responses were probed and explored where more information, or greater clarity, was required.

Each interviewee answered the following basic questions:

- ▶ Have your experiences of school stress always been unpleasant?
- ▶ Can you think of any occasions when the experience has been 'motivating' or has brought 'positive benefits'?
- ▶ Do you think that stress is a normal and acceptable part of every pupil's school life?
- ▶ Can you add anything more to the feelings you described in the questionnaire that you experience when under stress?
- ▶ Can you add anything more to the situations you described which make you feel stress at school?

- ▶ Do certain people - peers, teachers or other adults maybe - make you feel more stressed than others?
- ▶ Would you describe to me your worst experience of school stress?
- ▶ What would have helped you in that situation?
- ▶ What is your happiest experience of school so far?
- ▶ Can you think of anything that would make this school less stressful for its pupils?
- ▶ Do you think that boys and girls are treated equally at this school?
- ▶ Are you optimistic about the future? What are your hopes and dreams?

The first three questions aimed to clarify the interviewees' perception of stress as a positive as well as a negative experience and to ascertain how normal and acceptable a part of school life they felt it to be. The next three questions aimed to add more detail to the information the interviewees gave on their questionnaire on the situations that caused them to feel stress and what that stress felt like for them. Question six proved to be 'redundant' as none of the interviewees felt able to comment in any depth on this question and it has therefore been largely ignored in my analysis. The next three questions asked the interviewees to describe specific incidents of school stress and aimed to discover whether they felt that they could have been helped in that situation. Question nine provided a balance for these questions as I needed to eliminate the possibility of an individual for whom school was always a negative experience, who would therefore have been unable to answer the question. The last two questions aimed to elicit their opinions and ideas regarding stress and the school in relation to the nature of this research. The final question aimed to determine whether they felt positive or not about the future to see if their school experience had in any way 'coloured' their future expectations.

The interviews have been analysed according to the groups of questions described above and at the end of this analysis I suggest a male and female 'stress typology' determined from the interview data.

Despite the fact that none of the interviewees could recall a positive aspect to stress on their questionnaire, some were able to recall positive benefits when interviewed. These positive benefits were mostly perceived in terms of improving time management or increasing motivation and were mentioned by both boys and girls. One boy in year 11 said that stress increased his competitiveness and one girl, also in year 11, said that stress had taught her to be patient.

'When we did an RAF Careers type thing, (initiative course), and there was a lot of stress in getting a suitable time limit. But because everyone was working so hard we got it done.'

(Joe year 11).

'Yes, when I've had a lot of work and I feel stressed about it, it motivates me to get it all done.'

(Suzie year 11).

'I think it does give you patience but the one I remember is an English essay and the essay had to be in. I always get it in before it has to be handed in, but knowing there is a deadline there puts you under stress a bit. But it motivates you more and like you tend to get a higher mark because you tend to organise your time better.'

(Sally year 11).

'Yes, perhaps when you're getting stressed out in a negative way it actually brings you to think about it more. It depends how it affects you, like if I was affected because of bickering it would probably do me good. I would probably learn something from it, do you know what I mean? Learn from the situation so it actually has a positive outcome. But the feeling of stress at the time didn't actually benefit me really.'

(Julie year 11).

Younger pupils, especially in years 7 and 8 found it quite difficult to recognise a positive aspect to stress. Both year 7 pupils described stress as an unpleasant feeling; the boy associated stress with nervousness, anger and boredom while the girl felt that stress, 'complicated things' for her. She said that she thought that she experienced more stress than her peers and at the time of the interview she felt that she had little control over her feelings and felt 'unhappy quite a lot of the time'. She was very articulate and described her feelings in some detail:

'It is sort of like when you are trapped, you can't go anywhere, especially in lessons. You can't go anywhere or do anything. You just have to wait and see what happens. It is like when somebody has died or something. You can't get away from the sadness. I feel like I'm going to cry. I feel hot and panicky. It happens once every two or three days. Sometimes you get good patches and sometimes you get bad patches. When I feel panicky, I feel like I want to hit something or just shout out something or go away or something. It makes me feel quite aggressive.'

(Sarah year 7).

Another girl this time in year 9 expressed similar feelings to Sarah although less articulately. She could see no positive benefits to stress and she felt stressed 'most of the time but not always' at school. She said that she often felt like 'giving up' and that her stress was something she 'deserved, like a punishment'. However, she was unable to elaborate on those feelings.

One boy in year 8 had quite strong reservations to the idea that stress could be positive.

The experience discussed was a 'family stress', but its consequences made the pupil concerned feel very stressed in school. This was a very difficult experience for all the family members and the pupil interviewed had found it particularly distressing. He found it quite difficult to talk about his feelings and apparently the interview with me was the first time he had been able to talk at length about the experience. I was informed of this by the boy's mother who requested an appointment with me at a subsequent Parents' Evening.

Appointments are usually made in school time with pupils, who then take their 'booking sheet' home to whoever is to attend the Parents' Evening. I do not teach the pupil concerned and the appointment was made over the telephone by one of the school secretaries. I was puzzled as to why this parent wanted to see me; I did not recognise the surname as all the interviews with the pupils had been recorded using Christian names only.

When I met the boy's mother she wanted to thank me. Her son had come home after his interview and was able to talk to her and to confide in her in a way he had not been able to before; she felt I had helped him to do this. This was a 'positive outcome' of stress for the pupil and for his mother:

'Mostly unpleasant. Stress was caused mainly by our move from Kent. Spent a long time selling the house, and Mum and Dad were splitting up. It was quite hard for me and my two sisters. I cannot think of any time when it was good. I suppose good things come out of it in the end sometimes.'

(Paul year 8).

All interviewees felt that school stress was a normal and acceptable part of school life, 'up to a point'. The 'point' being whether or not the person suffering the stress remained 'in control' or whether their stress was affecting other people.

'I think it is normal but I don't know whether it should be normal, and it is acceptable to a certain level. If it's getting to a point where you just don't think you can carry on and things are getting on top of you, then it shouldn't be acceptable. But if it just motivates you more then it is, yes, but I think it's accepted and is normal in the society, (and in school), we live in at the moment. I think it's just that we get used to it. We aren't usually asked about it. You just have to cope with it yourself.'

(Julie year 11).

'When people start shouting at each other and getting ratty with staff, just basically can't handle it any more, that's when it gets unacceptable. It's acceptable when they know they are stressed, but can control it.'

(Lee year 11).

'Yeah, really. You are always under pressure of some sort at school. Yes, it's acceptable. You can control it, some people can feel violent. I can control it. I just take it out on one of my sisters.'

(Russell year 9).

'Yes, it's acceptable. Not too much, but it's acceptable. It's OK for people to feel stressed. But if they get too much stress they should try and sort it out. Talk to somebody about it.'

(James year 9).

In the next group of questions, interviewees were invited to expand on the feelings they associated with their stress and on the situations in school which caused them to experience stress.

Interviewees referred to the same feelings as categorised from the questionnaire data. Most talked about their feelings relating to anxiety, anger and unhappiness with some reference to the 'physical symptoms' they associate with their stress. Two pupils, both in year 8 had consulted a doctor with stress related symptoms. One of them, a boy, had been diagnosed as having an allergy to dairy products directly related to stress. The other, a girl, suffered stress related migraine attacks:

'Stress gives me a headache. Once when I was really stressed I started getting migraines. I was sent home from school. When the stress went away, the headache went away.'

(Louise year 8).

Other interviewees, especially girls, likened their feelings when stressed to feelings of illness particularly headaches and sickness:

'Yes, sometimes. It can bring on headaches, when I feel stressed. Like when people intimidate you, like someone in the classroom - sometimes it's been teachers and I've been thinking 'don't ask me a question' and I get stressed. This is short term stress. I will go to my next lesson with an headache because of all the adrenaline which has been rushing. I just go totally blank, you know, actually feel ill.'

(Suzie year 11).

'Well, I am usually depressed and nervous when I'm stressed. I just start feeling sick and I get headaches. I don't shake when I'm nervous but the colour drains from my face. I just go pale.'

(Hannah year 10).

Feeling tired when stressed was mentioned by pupils quite frequently on the questionnaire and was elaborated upon during the interviews. One boy in year 10 had particular trouble with sleeping when stressed:

'Uneasy, nervous. I just worry a lot of the time. I don't feel right some days. Sometimes I don't sleep very well. I have always had problem sleeping but it gets worse if I'm stressed. If I have something on my mind I can not sleep. Sometimes if it is the weekend and I haven't got to go to school, I sometimes don't go to bed until 2 o' clock, in the week I usually get about five hours. This becomes less if I am worried.'

(Robert year 10).

'It always makes me feel tired, tired I think more than anything. When other people have a problem I worry about them, it makes me stressed. If someone has died and it's really affecting them, if they were close, it really worries me. My Dad's very upset and it worries me, I get really panicky about it.'

(Suzie year 11).

The feelings associated with anxiety that I had categorised from the questionnaire were referred to frequently in the interviews. 'Worry' was often mentioned by interviewees and I tried to establish the differences between feeling worried and feeling stressed. The pupils found it hard to articulate a clear difference but were insistent that they are two separate feelings which can be experienced individually or simultaneously as a response to a situation they find unpleasant:

'It makes me nervous, I can't think about what I'm doing. Stress and worry are two similar types of feelings. You can experience them both at the same time. If you are worried about something you feel stressed.'

(Megan year 8).

'There is always something to worry about. Being stressed and worried are not the same thing. When I'm worried, I'm really worried. When I'm stressed, it's just my problem that I have to think about. You can be stressed and worried at the same time. It's terrible.'

(Louise year 8).

Feelings associated with anger were commonly expressed mainly with feelings of aggression but sometimes with unhappiness also:

'I just feel angry, I just want to....., it depends. If I feel stressed with a person I just want to shout, it is an aggressive feeling. It makes me angry, I just have to like calm down. Sometimes it makes me worry, and I feel like crying. Sometimes in the lessons, I get headaches.'

(Emma year 9).

'You feel lonely a lot, and you want to talk to your friends but sometimes you can't. If you are depressed, sometimes you might want to cry, it gets on top of you. Sometimes it all builds up inside you because you can't tell anyone. You might crack up one day, or burst into tears.'

(Elisa year 9).

'You feel all this power inside you. You know it's just building up and if anyone started on you, started fighting with you, you could just push them and they would go flying. You just feel so strong. You could just lift anything or do anything. You know you have got the power there, but you don't like to use it. Keep it inside you.'

(Lee year 11).

'I think sometimes you feel that you're on your own. Everyone is asking for things and you're on your own. No one to depend on. I don't usually tell people, I keep things to myself.'

(Mark year 11).

'You get really fed-up and you have got all this energy and you just want to hit them or something. You feel uptight for the rest of the day and you end up moaning at all your friends.'

(Joe year 11).

'It makes me feel angry. When I see everybody around who seem to be coping, even though they may not it just appears they are. There are little things people say that are just comments, but because you're tired and stressed you tend to take them more personally. I used to feel unhappy, I used to more but now I tend to have a lot more to do and to get on with. I just do different things that take up my time more and give me more experience with people, it all helps.'

(Sally year 11).

When asked to elaborate more on the feelings experienced when stressed there was considerable difference between male and female interviewees. The males tended to give quite succinct answers which needed probing to discover more detail; they described feeling either aggressive or isolated. The female interviewees gave more elaborate answers which needed no further probing and described feelings of anxiety, unhappiness and anger generally. All were remarkably honest in disclosing their emotions when under stress. I mentioned in the previous chapter an observation that girls generally tended to fill in their questionnaires with more care than males, supplying more detailed responses to some of the questions. I suggested that either, they had more empathy with the subject of the questionnaire, or more empathy with the questionnaire method as a means of research owing to their own frequent use of questionnaires. Perhaps the more elaborate answers supplied by girls in the interviews supports the idea that it is the subject that girls are relating to more with than the method.

Sources of this school stress remained fairly consisted, although to varying degrees, over the year groups and correlated with the questionnaire data. In this analysis of the interviews I will refer to the same categories of 'stressors' identified by the questionnaire: relationships with peers, teachers or family; curriculum generated stressors and every day

life stressors. As would be expected from the questionnaire data, curriculum generated stressors were referred to with the most frequency, especially by Upper School pupils.

Relationships with peers and teachers were mentioned by pupils in every year group, but there was little reference to other relationships outside school. Bullying was mentioned the most frequently:

'There's a lot of people who have a go at other people. Like when someone starts a fight, things like that. Not that the teachers don't do anything about it, they try and find out why it is happening. Bullying and things like that. I think that there is a lot of bullying. If I made a list of things wrong with this school, it would be at the top.'

(Emma year 9).

Another interviewee talked of bullying as a source of stress both for the victims and for the bullies:

'Being bullied can cause a lot of stress. I think it is quite common in this school. Not so much nowadays, but when you come into the first year. Nowadays you might be doing the bullying, but you realise how the other people feel because you felt like that in the first year. I was bullied in the first year, mainly by the second and third years. The Upper School weren't that bad to me. The bullying was name calling, it wasn't ever physical. I sometimes retaliated if they called me stuff to my face but I never got into a fight or anything. Bullies must also feel some sort of stress, they must have some problem somewhere, and they must take it out on someone.'

(Katy year 9).

Neither of these pupils felt that there was anything that could be done to help them to deal with their stress in this situation, other than having a sympathetic member of staff to talk to. All pupils thought that teachers 'did their best' or 'did what they could' but

recognised the limits of any intervention, believing that they alone were responsible for 'sorting things out in the end'.

Some of the interviewees talked about peer groups and the expectation on pupils to 'conform' and 'fit in'. This was identified as being more of a problem during the first three years at school, gradually lessening in importance as pupils moved up the school, matured and learned to accept themselves and others:

'I think the main thing is peer pressure. The different groups that are formed in the playground and if you're not in a certain group, you know you're not anyone. Not really worth anything as a person. I think often there is a lot of prejudice in the school yard and in the common room area and a lot of pressure on you if you are not in certain groups. I think people should be more willing to mix or more willing to get to know different people rather than just making judgements.'

(Suzie year 11).

'As I have got older I have tended to accept people for what they are. There's no acts or anything. You know when people are trying to be nice. Everyone is very natural. You know when you are younger, it's very bubbly and you're very much involved with yourself. You're it. You're what you think about. When you get older, there's a lot more to consider. I think you realise what people do for you. How much your family has given you, how much you need your friends. You realise you're not the only important person.'

(Sally year 11).

Relationships with members of staff were mentioned twice, on both occasions by male pupils. One observed negative attitudes in staff who appeared to be unhappy in their work. Perhaps under stress themselves?

'Some teachers make lessons enjoyable, they relax. Some have got an attitude on them, they don't want to do the job. Most teachers have got enthusiasm, they want to teach you. But there are some who don't'.

(James year 9).

'Some members of staff make me feel nervous, without actually being cross or anything, it's just the way they are. Their attitude, their reputation makes you feel nervous of them. They are angry people. They seem to be to me.'

(Paul year 8).

In the case above the teacher actually added to the pupil's stress by making him feel 'nervous' without a specific reason. Indirectly this statement answers question six without the question actually being asked. This question asked interviewees if certain people made them feel more stressed than others. Only one interviewee could give me an answer to that question when asked in the interview.

Relationships with parents, or other significant others at home, were mentioned particularly in the context of expectation. Some interviewees felt that they were pressured by unrealistic expectations of parents, while others felt that parental support encouraged them to do well:

'I like to do well, it's very important to be successful. My Mum and Dad like me to do well. They don't put me under any pressure, they help me out a lot. My Mum was very clever, she was always top of the class, she would like me to do the same.'

(Louise year 8).

One interviewee has parents who are both teachers in secondary schools. His parents often talked of 'the stress of teaching' at home, which made him feel 'under pressure':

'Just feel under pressure. Just feel everything is on top of you, you feel you have to do everything well. Pressure comes from parents mainly, sometimes from my sisters who say I won't do as well as them. Sometimes a bit from teachers but they are concentrating on the whole class, not just individuals. I feel under pressure to live up to my parents' expectations. They expect me to do well in GCSE's and stuff. They are teachers and they think teaching is really hard, and they think school work is really easy. I feel there is more pressure on me because my parents are teachers. Like sometimes my Dad looks at my work and he knows the marks. He is pressuring me to do more. Sometimes it is a disadvantage. But they do help me when I'm stuck.'

(Russell year 9).

The expectations of others was also closely linked to other curriculum generated stressors cited by interviewees. The male interviewees in particular spoke most vehemently about school rules and school discipline being a source of stress particularly when they felt rules were unclear, or enforced inconsistently. Typical examples were of minor discretion at lunch times which had caused conflict with lunch time supervisors. This may imply a difference in expectation of behavioural standards between teaching and non-teaching staff, or a difference in pupil behaviour, as no such incidents were reported in lesson time:

'Living up to people's expectations - parents, teachers and grandparents - is a cause of stress. You're expected to get the grades. Getting into trouble at school. There's a lot of rules you have to keep to. If you don't and you think you're going to get caught, that worries you. Going down a corridor at break to get my bag and a dinner lady took my pass and I didn't know why. I didn't know we're not meant to go down that corridor. I was mainly annoyed. Annoyed and stressed.'

(Lee year 10).

One of the males felt particularly strongly that the inflexibility, structures and routines of school contributed to stress for its pupils. He found the very nature and role of being 'a pupil' the cause of much of his own school stress. The following extract, although lengthy, highlights the strength of his feelings and resentments particularly well.

'That you have to be at school at such and such a time or you get a detention and stuff. And you have to come to school every day, no breaks, you cannot have a day off. One day you know you are not going to work because you have had a really good result, you have just passed and you know you're not going to work because you are so excited, because you are doing something or you're going on holiday. You know you're not going to work and you're just going to put other people off and so end up in detention. But you still have to come to school. It's just the way you have to come to school.

It's just the inflexibility of it. It's like you are not treated as a normal person. It's like as if I walk down the street with the people I go around with now, they always treat you the same as them, but you find at school they treat you lower. It's like I go out of school with my friends who are 16 and 17, or I go out with my parents on a Saturday night. It's usually just me and my parents, us and them, we just have a laugh and it's adult, and I feel like an adult then. Then I come back to school and you have to sit down in assembly and listen to the big teacher talking, and it's just 'what am I doing here?' I just want to leave, I think it's not worth it. It's so degrading.'

(Joe year 11).

Other sources of curriculum generated stress cited included work overload or underload. Lack of liaison between Faculties in setting coursework deadlines was given as a particular example of an unnecessary source of stress, and one which the school could take steps to avoid with more careful planning and co-operation:

'Maybe when, between the Maths and Humanities teachers are trying to organise it, so present all the coursework all at one time and then no coursework at the same time. It just seems like all Maths and Humanities and then when you finish, you've no coursework. And then you get it all again at the same time. Well, it's like rest time and work time. Never like steady work, constant work. There's never enough time. It's either pressure, or relax.'

(Lee year 11).

Specific incidents of school related stress were explored in more detail in the next group of questions. Typically responses to question seven, which asked pupils to talk about their worst experience of school stress, fell into two categories: relationships with peers or staff and a curriculum generated incident. Females tended to describe conflicts in relationships with peers, particular lessons or subjects; the males tended to cite conflict in relationships, one of which had led to the pupil interviewed being temporarily excluded, problems with work load, other people's expectations (parents) and the standards set by the school. Two pupils were particularly critical and vocal about the school's standard of discipline, the rules and the authority they were expected to accept. At the time of these interviews, the school management had just introduced a 'dress code' which all pupils had to accept or find an alternative school. This had led to much ill-feeling among many pupils, especially in the Upper School, who seemed to feel most keenly a sense of injustice and loss of personal choice over their dress. Many felt that they should have been consulted before the decision to revert back to a dress code was made. In fact the decision had been made in response to 'popular demand' after consultation with parents. Each family with pupils attending the school had had the opportunity to express their viewpoint on a questionnaire which had been issued by the school. However, many of the pupils seemed to feel that it was really their parents' views which had been represented on the questionnaire and that

their own views had been overlooked. In the interviews with me, many of the Upper School pupils and especially the boys, referred to 'the dress code' as an unnecessary source of stress for them. By this, they were also referring to 'the process' by which the dress code had been introduced to the school, as well as the limitations in choice of clothes which the dress code had impinged. For one interviewee, the dress code was the 'final straw' and brought many resentments from the past into the conversation:

'Enforcing dress codes, assignments and not understanding what to do. When a teacher gets at you all the time and you think like what have I done wrong? You don't think you have done anything wrong, but they always seem to think that they are right. Being told off for things you were not doing wrong deliberately. Forgetting your P.E. kit. You do it just once and they have a mass go at you for it. If you forget your work, or it's late, they really have a big go at you. That makes me feel dead mad. But it is still a source of stress. Some teachers - they think they are always right. They use their authority to tell you to shut up. They say 'shut up' if you are right and they don't like to admit it. Being unreasonable. That's about it, those who use their authority to put you down. Deliberately. Also pupils who go around boasting how good they are. I just get sick of it after a bit. You just wish they would shut up. They keep distracting you. Arrogance. Boastfulness.'

(Andrew year 10).

None of the interviewees had a problem recalling their worst experience of school stress and some long and complicated stories were told. Many interviewees perhaps saw this question as an opportunity to air unresolved grievances from the past, and as such it may have had some therapeutic value. One interviewee offered the following insight into her memories of school. At the time of the interview she was in the last term of her final year:

'I'll tell you something definitely. You remember the good things about it because the good things always remain the same and you often find people talking about good times. But bad things, when you look back in a few years they don't feel so bad, or you don't often remember them that much. Or perhaps it is a sub-conscious thing that you don't really want to. I look back and I just remember the good times and I can't think why it was such a big deal to me in the third year when I was in a situation where I didn't have a very nice life.'

(Julie year 11).

The interviewees were asked what they thought might have helped them during their worst experience of school stress. One female said that she did not think a teacher, or the school, could have done anything to help but the others all mentioned wanting someone to talk to or wanting to be listened to. One of the males mentioned needing reassurance and one would have liked less interference and more privacy.

The following extracts are from the interviews with males:

'If the teacher tells you something and you try to argue back they chuck you straight into detention. They should let you argue your side of the story. If they let you argue they would probably get to see your side of the story. I always argue back and they always tell me to shut up. It seems to help. It does not help me - it seems to help them.'

(Joe year 11).

'Interference. Everybody - friends - girlfriends - everybody wants to know. You can't say something to someone and get away with it. You have to keep your feelings, or your deepest feelings, inside or you just get hurt. Most people I know are fed up with people interfering. I like to keep some things back, but it is important to have someone when things get you down. It would just get you down more.'

(Lee year 11).

'They could maybe talk to people, like say one week like in a tutor group, a stress meeting, a tutor group talk on how to get over stress.'

(Mark year 11).

All interviewees felt that teachers were generally supportive but limited in what they could do to help. They recognised the need for individuals to come to terms with the things which caused the stress and find their own coping strategies:

'We have got Form Tutors. I have got a Form Tutor I can actually talk to. I am not frightened to talk to them. Some people are a bit shy and they can't talk to their teacher. You can't be shy, you've got to be out in the open.'

(James year 9).

The final group of questions were more general asking interviewees for suggestions of ways to make the school a less stressful place to be and whether or not they felt the school treated its pupils equally. Finally they were asked about their ambitions, hopes and dreams for the future.

There were few positive suggestions for making the school less stressful, and many of the comments made in question eight were repeated in this question. However, one pupil suggested the school 'should cut down on bullying', and another suggested that 'over-crowding' caused stress.

'Sometimes I think it's a bit overcrowded and you haven't got anywhere to go. Especially in Winter and the weather is not very nice. It makes you feel worse.'

(Sarah year 7).

As this pupil had been a member of the school for less than a year, perhaps she was missing the 'closer' and more protective environment of her previous junior school. Maybe pupils become more used to the school environment over time, or accept their circumstances as something they cannot change. Certainly, as pupils move up the school they are given more 'space' and when they are in Year 11 they also have access to an indoor 'common room'. This was the first and only reference linking an environmental feature of the school to stress.

One other positive suggestion to make the school less stressful was having a school counsellor to whom pupils could self-refer:

'Perhaps a counsellor, for more extreme cases. I think there are quite a few who could do with that sort of thing because I know quite a lot of people who have got quite a lot of problems in my year.'

(Paul year 8).

The next question asked the interviewees whether they thought pupils were treated equally at school, or whether they thought there were any areas of school life where boys and girls were not treated the same. All the interviewees had quite definite opinions on this but there was little variation of views. Everyone felt that in general males and females were treated the same; both male and female interviewees said they were treated differently in P.E. lessons and one male thought that girls were put under more pressure than boys in Maths lessons and in examinations.

'Sometimes in some of the exams, the girls are pushed more than the boys. It's in most of the subjects. Maths seems to be very different for girls, girls seem to be pressured a little more than boys. The teachers seem to be on at the girls to revise, but not so much with the boys, I don't know why.'

(Suzie year 11).

Both male and female interviewees, when probed on the question of equality, felt that differences were more obvious in how males and females show their emotions at school. All felt that males were more likely to hide their emotions, but females found it easier to talk about their feelings. (This has already been noted earlier in this chapter). However, the general feeling seemed to be that despite this, boys perhaps coped better with stress than girls.

'I don't think boys show their emotions as much as girls. They don't share them as much, they bottle it all up. They think that they can cope with it better.'

(Sally year 11).

'Boys feel a lot of stress. They just don't show it.'

(Mark year 11).

'The fact is that a lot of girls like to show their stress to their friends. In Science lessons there's this table were we sit. We talk about all the stress situations but they (girls) seem to revolve round stress. But stress doesn't just revolve around them. They seem to live for it. I know its a nasty thing to say, but they seem to live for it.'

(Lee year 11).

'They have stress but they (boys) like to keep it a secret. They don't like showing it'.

(Joe year 11).

The dress code was mentioned again and by the same male pupil who expressed his views so vehemently previously. He added:

'Dress code, the girls are allowed to wear white socks and the boys are not. Really stupid rules like that, and I think we should all be allowed to do the same things. If you suggested it to staff, they just blow it off and change the subject. This is the sort of attitude that makes me feel cross and stressed. You are not really getting through to them.'

(Andrew year 10).

Since conducting this interview with this pupil, the rule regarding the white socks which he referred to has been changed as a response to complaints from pupils and from staff as to its discriminatory nature. Perhaps his words did not fall on deaf ears after all!

The observation that girls and boys show their stress differently was made again by these pupils. Both male and female interviewees shared the opinion that boys did not show their stress as much as girls.

'Boys never seem to get stressed about anything. They don't understand as much as girls. I think they try and hide it a lot and put on a macho image. They never seem to tell you, a few of them do but not a lot. I have met one boy who is stressed, and that's it.'

(Kathryn year 10).

'Sometimes I don't go for help That's when I get into trouble. You have to learn as you go on you have to have help, you can't always sort it out yourself. Girls know this. I think everybody needs help at sometime or another. You can't go through life without being helped sometime.'

(Robert year 10).

One of the interviewees thought that girls were treated better than boys in the classroom and felt that personally she had been on the receiving end of 'teacher favouritism':

'I think that girls are treated better in class and the boys always think so too. Like some teachers never tell girls off. It's not mainly because we're not naughty or do anything to get told off for. But the boys always do things that are naughty, but they say that the teachers always take our (girls) side. Like with Mrs.X, me and Becka have been late a few times this year and she has only given us two late marks. Some of the boys say she's only being nice to us because we are quite close, and talk to her about our problems. They think that the teachers favour us and I think some of them do. I think it's mainly because we don't have to be told off as much. Our class is typical of our year, the boys are always jumping around and noisy, they are the ones who get blamed for it anyway. The girls don't. They just sit there quiet and perfect.'

(Katy year 9).

The pupil who referred to her stress as a 'punishment' earlier in the interview, said that she did not notice any inequality in gender but she thought that there was discrimination between 'clever' pupils and those who did not match up to their standards:

'No I think girls and boys are treated equally. I think sometimes the cleverest people are treated the best, they are treated with more respect. If they do more work or better homework the teachers go on about it and it gets on your nerves sometimes. People who, like can't get up their standards, don't get any reward. So the amount of praise given is unequal. This happens quite a bit in my experience. My friends feel this too.'

(Emma year 9).

Only one pupil commented on the 'occasional' example of sexism which occurred in the school:

'Occasionally, teachers will say, 'I need two strong boys to carry something.' I think that is sexist.'

(Sarah year 7)

The final question asked the interviewees what their hopes and ambitions for the future were. Generally, the older interviewees all had positive ideas and expectations and felt optimistic about their future. None felt that their experiences of stress at school would affect their future achievements, although some expected to feel just as much stress in their adult lives. Ambitions were quite modest, and maybe a little bit predictable, and seemed realistic:

'A nice job, earn some money. pay my Grandma back.'

(Lee year 11).

'Having someone to talk to and not being on my own. Friendships, relationships. Just that someone there that I can talk to.'

(Sally year 11).

'I am going into the Army or the Air Corps and I have visions of dying there. It doesn't bother me a lot. I am just not bothered by it.'

(Joe year 11).

'I'm hoping to go on to college and eventually become a photographer.'

(Mark year 11).

'I want to be happy. I don't want to be rich, but I want money for a nice house, meet a lot of people - just be happy.'

(Julie year 11).

One female was a little more cautious in her comments:

'I don't feel safe about my future. You don't know what's going to happen to you, do you?'

(Suzie year 11).

Some interviewees were less optimistic about their future:

'There are no jobs, the Government has really kept the country down, there is a big recession on. If I left school at 16 and I didn't get very good grades there wouldn't be much chance of me getting a job. That stresses me - worrying about what I'm going to do when I leave school. There is a lot of stress outside school that people bring into school that adds to the stress of school. For example, the family splitting up, if there is a death in the family, if there is a problem with drugs. This is becoming more and more of a common problem in this school. People in this school turn to alcohol, this is also a problem in this school. There are a lot of people who get drunk. When you are drunk it is a different feeling to what it is when you are normal. It doesn't change the real world, that stays the same. It just gives you a bit of relief. Also people smoke to relieve stress.'

(Robert year 10).

'I haven't got a clue! I think the future is the worst thing to think about. You don't know what the future holds. I think I will go to college. I worry about World issues. Things like war. I worry about family stuff. I worry about relationships and making a mistake.'

(Andrew year 10).

The younger pupils were understandably less sure about their future plans.

However, most seemed optimistic. As with the older interviewees, the boys talked about their future in terms of career while the girls tended to emphasise personal fulfilment more.

'Get GCSE passes, go to university and become an accountant. I feel quite optimistic about the future.'

(Russel year 9).

'I want to go in the RAF and be a technician. I feel quite optimistic about the future, you've got to be haven't you? You can't feel that everything is going to go wrong, that isn't the right attitude. Yes, I feel quite in control of what will happen to me in the future.'

(James year 9).

'I hope to have a good life and lots of family and friends around me, not to be lonely. That I have friends to talk to and people around is really important to me. I feel quite optimistic about the future. A good education and a good job. Get married later.'

(Katy year 9).

'I would quite like to do woodland conservation or tree surgery, something environmental anyway. I am quite optimistic about my future.'

(Ian year 7).

'My perfect life would be to finish school and get good results. Live somewhere nice. Very quiet. Where it is not too hot like a city. I don't know really. Sometimes I think I might like to be an optician, but I'm not really sure. Sometimes I think of myself sitting at home with no friends. I'm not very good at making friends. I can't always think of something to say. So I don't say anything. I never seem to be in the right place at the right time. Sometimes my friends are making other friends and I don't know what to do'.

(Sarah year 7).

SUMMARY

A general summary of responses from all year groups has been made in the same sequence as the questions were asked. Some conclusions can be drawn from the information given by the pupils in these interviews and in the questionnaires. The conclusions follow the summary.

Stress is perceived as an unpleasant experience by both males and females. When questioned, most pupils could recognise positive aspects of their stress. However, this was not mentioned without 'prompting' in the interviews and was not mentioned on the questionnaires. Positive benefits fell into three main categories: increased motivation or competitiveness, better time management and improved results or performances. One parent of an interviewee, reported a significant improvement in her strained relationship with her son as a result of 'family stress', after her son's interview as part of this research.

All pupils interviewed perceived stress as a 'normal' part of school life and 'acceptable up to a point'. This 'point' is ill-defined. It is associated with being 'in control' or 'not in control' and is related to causing harm (non-specific) to either the person experiencing the stress, the effect that person has on other people or both.

This ill-defined point is reflected in my model of school stress discussed in Chapter 2. In the model, stress occurs when the result of not coping with the perceived demand has personal and damaging consequences for the individual involved. Coping or not coping with the demand is synonymous with being 'in control' or 'not in control'.

The pupil who has perceived a demand as potentially stressful and who appraises his/her ability to cope positively, feels 'in control', although some stress may be experienced

the pupil employs the appropriate coping strategies and meets the challenge of the demand. The pupil who perceives a demand as potentially stressful and who appraises his/her ability to cope negatively, will feel 'not in control' and stress will be experienced. This stress may be acute or chronic depending on the nature of the demand itself and the pupil's ability to recognise he/she needs help and to seek support, and the school's willingness to offer that support if it is requested by the pupil.

In general terms the pupils felt that 'too much stress is harmful', but pupils found it difficult to elaborate on the nature of this harm in these interviews, perhaps because of its subjectivity.

As a general observation, the males tended to associate their stress with other feelings of power, anger and aggression (although this was not exclusively a 'male feeling'); females were more inclined to associate their stress with feelings of sadness, unhappiness and tearfulness. Both males and females mentioned feelings of loneliness, depression, anxiety and nervousness. All interviewees mentioned physical symptoms associated with feeling stress, the main symptoms were headaches and physical sickness.

The situations that these pupils described fell into the same consistent 'categories' determined by the questionnaire data, although the circumstances were obviously different. The main categories of situation described were:

- ▶ Those relating to relationships in school and curriculum generated situations:
- ▶ Relationships with peers and teachers (males only mentioned this), and situations perceived as bullying by the pupil concerned. This was almost exclusively mentioned by Lower School pupils, male and female.

- ▶ Other people's expectations - mainly parents, but teachers, peers, siblings and Grandparents were also mentioned by both males and females.
- ▶ The attitude of teachers was mentioned by males, one of whom also mentioned school rules and discipline, and had also described a situation of conflict in his relationship with staff.
- ▶ School work - overload and underload; meeting homework and coursework deadlines; tests and examination, not understanding the work set or feeling that it had not been explained properly in the first place.
- ▶ Authority, school rules and discipline was cited by males in the Upper School only.
- ▶ Lack of space, privacy and overcrowding were each given brief mention by both females and males.

Only one male interviewee mentioned anyone specifically who made him feel more stressed than other people and this was his Mother. This was also the same interviewee whose mother felt that their relationship had been improved by stress and by the interview discussed previously. This interviewee gave a specific example of his Mother always being in a hurry and 'nearly always being late'; her rushing around made the interviewee feel nervous:

'My Mum, because she has lots of work to do in her job. She has to race around and go to meetings. She is always very nearly late. I would describe my Mother as being under stress and I think she would say that she is under stress. By her racing around makes everyone feel nervous because it puts everyone on edge.'

Other pupils mentioned that when their friends were under stress it sometimes made them feel stress too, especially if they were not enjoying their normal levels of communication, but no other specific examples were given.

All of the interviewees could describe their 'worst experience of school stress'.

'Thinking time' was offered on this question, but none of the interviewees needed to accept it. Their responses elaborated on the situations described above. Some written accounts of these experiences can be found in Appendix Two. As a 'balance' to this question, the pupils were also asked to describe their happiest memory of school. I used this question as a 'check' to see if any of the pupils perceived school as 'all bad'. Again none of the pupils had any difficulty thinking of their happiest memory and no one needed time to think. Even the two male pupils who had been most critical of the school found a positive memory to describe.

When asked what would have helped the pupils to cope in their 'worst situation' most pupils felt that the school, or teachers, had helped all they could. Only one female was critical of how she had been treated. Pupils seemed to accept limitations on 'what teachers can do' recognising a degree of personal responsibility and control over individual feelings. The need to talk to a sympathetic and impartial person was mentioned consistently, as was the need to be 'listened to' by that person. Many pupils mentioned the need/desire for the school to provide 'someone to talk to' in the questionnaire, but only one person mentioned the need for a 'professional counsellor' in the interviews. Several pupils mentioned the

usefulness of their Form Tutor in times of crisis, but this was not unanimous. Some pupils felt that their Form Tutor was not someone that they could approach and that it was 'a matter of luck' as to whether the Form Tutor was the 'right' person to help pupils.

Most of the interviewees had a suggestion to help make the school 'less stressful' for its pupils although many of these suggestions had already been talked through as part of previous questions. The main suggestions were: better co-ordination between Faculties when setting homework/coursework deadlines; stress management lessons; school rules and regulations made clearer; less bullying; less crowding and a school counsellor. Apart from the last two suggestions which came from a female and male pupil respectively, the suggestions were made by both male and female pupils.

The question on equality met with almost consistent responses. Sport and P.E. lessons were given as examples of males and females being treated differently by almost all interviewees but not necessarily as a criticism. Some females expressed a desire to play the same sport as the males, but in general terms the females could see why restrictions were in place. Since completing these interviews, football practice is available at lunch time to both males and females. It might be that this will make sport a less contentious issue in the future. Other perceived sources of inequality mentioned by the pupils were: encouragement in some maths lessons and examinations; criticism as to the general behaviour of pupils - the boys being on the receiving end of the most frequent as observed and mentioned by females, but not males; and an inequality in 'the distribution of praise'.

The last question asked how pupils perceived their future and aimed to discover how optimistic they felt about this. It was also asked to ascertain whether any of the pupils felt that their negative school experiences had 'coloured' their expectations of the future. This did not seem to be the case. In general the interviewees felt optimistic although there

were some pessimistic comments made by both males and females. Males who made pessimistic comments tended to address them at 'wider issues' for example economic recession and war; the females tended to make pessimistic comments of a more individual nature for example, not having friends. A considerable difference in expectation was also evident between male and females. The males mentioned almost exclusively their career intentions which were in the main quite modest and included: higher education, photography, conservation, the Forces and medicine. Few females mentioned a career. Those who did were again quite modest: optician, business and child minding. The females by far, but not exclusively, emphasised personal fulfilment in terms of: happiness, family, friends and 'a nice house'. One mentioned 'a good job' and one had thought about medicine, but they were not typical.

One question I asked all the interviewees but did not mentioned on 'the schedule' came right at the end of the interview. I asked them if they could think of anything they thought was important about stress which I had not asked them either on the questionnaire or in the interview: basically, 'what did they know that I didn't'!

There were surprisingly few answers to this question, perhaps because the interviewees had been given the opportunity to give additional information on the questionnaire, and most of those interviewed had.

In Year 11, one female said that she thought the school should be doing more about bullying than stress; she had not placed emphasis on this anywhere else in the interview. Her comments were as follows:

'I think it is a problem in every school. You can only eliminate it to a certain extent. Don't think that you can totally get rid of it. It gets less when you leave school. I think people learn to cope with it better, that's why it gets less. But there are certain people that get bullied, they're obviously under stress from it. People get bullied because of the types of people they are. They are always the victim. Just as there are people who are always the bullies.'

A male pupil in Year 10 offered the following additional information:

'A lot of my friends smoke because they are down and upset about things. They say it is reaction to stress, but I don't know. They say they are smoking because it's like a way out of it. I don't understand it. There has been a lot of parties and teenage drinking and things like that. A lot of people smoke cannabis as well. I don't know if I do it to relieve stress, but when you drink you feel quite happy.'

Another Year 10 pupil, a female, added the following:

'I think if the teacher does notice that you are stressed, I think that they should ask you about it. Because if you are not an open person, it is going to build up inside you. And also at the end of the third year and the beginning of the fourth year, someone should give us a talk or something saying that we will probably get a lot more stress. Tell you that you can talk to people about it and there's no need to be embarrassed. If someone is stressed they might be thankful that somebody actually asked them because they wanted to talk to somebody. A lot of people are shy and feel like it's not the thing to be, they don't want to let it out and I think you have got to learn to let it out.'

The only other comments came from a male and female respectively, in Year 9:

'People at school say that they are worried, but we don't get to talk about it much.'

'Only homework. Some weeks you don't get enough of it and then others you get too much. So at weekends you have got loads to do. If you're going out and you have loads to do, you might not have time to do it properly and probably do it at the last moment. Some teachers do not stick to the homework rota and give it on different days. Then you might have something really important to do on that day and it all gets on top of you really. It is a stress that could be avoided.'

CONCLUSIONS

The following basic conclusions may be drawn from the information ascertained from the questionnaires issued, and the interviews conducted, during 1993.

Stress is primarily perceived as negative and unpleasant by both males and females in all year groups. It is also considered 'acceptable' and 'normal', 'up to a point'. Stress is associated with depression, nervousness, anxiety, unhappiness, anger and aggression but as a different and separate feeling. Stress can be experienced at the same time as any of the previously mentioned feelings. Older males tend to associate stress with aggression more than females, but not exclusively. Both males and females experience stress physically and emotionally. There seems to be a finite number of school situations described as being stressful for both males and females. School does not seem to be perceived as a completely negative experience, even by the most critical pupils. In 'stressful situations', teachers are generally perceived as helpful, but with recognised limitations on what they can do to help. This is closely tied in with the idea of individual responsibility for feelings and personal control over situations; perhaps reflected in the idea of stress being a normal and acceptable part of school life. The pupils have ideas on how the school could help to reduce stress for its pupils but perceive a lack of channels through which to express them, reflected in the idea that 'no one ever asks us'. Perhaps this also indicates a feeling of 'powerlessness' to change their environment and supports the pupils' feelings of personal responsibility for what can be controlled for example, their response to their environment. Although a limited number of inequalities between males and females in the way they were treated were noted, none were considered serious in terms of affecting the quality of schooling or the quality of

school life. Generally the pupils feel optimistic about their futures. The males seem to have more positive aims in terms of career expectations while the females seem more concerned with personal fulfilment. Where concerns were expressed, females tended to worry about the lack of similar things to those they felt optimistic about for example: friendships and family life; things over which they ought to expect to have some degree of control. Where males expressed concerns they tended to be 'wider' issues over which they had little, or no, control.

All of these pupils talked openly, and I felt honestly, about their feelings and their experiences. The females tended to be more articulate when talking about their feelings and in most instances, needed little encouragement. The males tended to need more encouragement to talk and their answers needed more probing. This was also reflected in what they had to say about one another's strategies for coping with stress. Both males and females thought males were reluctant to show how they felt and tended to hide their feelings, while girls did more talking about how they felt.

All of these pupils showed a high degree of self-awareness although perhaps tended to under estimate their strengths and their potential.

From these interviews I suggest the following typologies which reflect some stereotypical gender differences:

TYPE 1 - FEMALE

Female interviewees who said that they experienced stress at school had the following typical characteristics: -

- ▶ They felt stress had few positive benefits although conceded that in some instances it motivates, encourages better time management or teaches patience.
- ▶ They felt little or no control over their stress and trapped by it. They may also feel they deserve to experience stress.
- ▶ They felt that stress, within limits, was acceptable.
- ▶ They were aware of feeling stress and recognise it as a separate feeling from being worried.
- ▶ They worry about themselves and others.
- ▶ They express self-doubt in their relationships and may prefer to be alone.
- ▶ They felt it was important to be successful, but expressed only modest personal expectations.
- ▶ Sources of school stress may include lessons, subjects, work overload, bullying, relationships with peers and peer pressure to conform.
- ▶ When stressed they may have physical symptoms for example headaches and sickness. They also report looking pale and experiencing 'butterflies' in the stomach.
- ▶ Some may consult a doctor with stress-related symptoms.
- ▶ When stressed they may feel lonely, insecure, depressed, nervous, tearful, angry, sad, tired or worried. They may feel intimidated by teachers.
- ▶ They feel that nothing can be done to help them but would like to be listened to.

TYPE 1 - MALE

Male interviewees who said that they experienced stress at school had the following typical characteristics: -

- ▶ They felt stress was always unpleasant but often had positive benefits, particularly concerning improving motivation or increasing competitiveness.
- ▶ They felt stress was acceptable in school and felt in control of their own stress.
- ▶ They felt optimistic about the future and planned for it, although had quite modest expectations.
- ▶ Sources of school stress may include conflicts in relationships, with peers and staff, work overload, rules and school discipline, examinations, other people's expectations (teachers and parents) and teachers' attitudes. They may feel intimidated by teachers.
- ▶ When stressed they may have physical symptoms, for example headaches and tiredness. They may have consulted a doctor with stress related symptoms.
- ▶ When stressed they may feel uptight, snappy, fed-up, uneasy, worried, nervous, alone and with no one to depend on. They might also feel strong and aggressive and need to 'keep it all inside'.
- ▶ They felt that nothing could be done to help them but would like reassurance, would like to talk and to be listened to. They may want more privacy and less interference from peers and teachers.

Both boys and girls describe similar physical manifestations of their stress and also similar feelings which they associate with being stressed. This might be expected as they are each describing their own perceptions of what must presumably be a similar feeling, that of 'being stressed'. Both boys and girls are prepared to seek medical help for relief of their stress and related symptoms, so again presumably most take their symptoms seriously and feel that they are significant enough to warrant visiting their doctor, (or their parents/guardians feel their symptoms are serious enough to seek medical help).

Both boys and girls describe similar sources of stress in school: curriculum generated and relationship stressors, but boys mention conflict in their relationships more frequently than girls. This conflict may also be associated with aggression and is reflected in a feeling of increased motivation and competitiveness aroused by stress, (only a few girls shared the feeling of enhanced motivation through stress). Boys more than girls felt 'in control' of their stress and generally optimistic about the future, reflected in planning and realistic aspirations. Girls felt little sense of control and quite pessimistic about their stress; aspirations tended to be quite low with stereotypical career choices relating to traditional 'feminine' or 'caring' roles being common, with a tendency to experience self-doubt in their abilities.

The idea of stress being 'controllable' or 'uncontrollable' may reflect external and internal locus of control. Research has shown that psychiatric symptoms such as depression and anxiety as a result of life-event stress, are more likely for individuals with high external locus of control than individuals with high internal locus of control (Johnson and Sarason 1978).

Both boys and girls seemed to see stress as 'a fact of life' about which they could do little. The vast majority (both boys and girls) believed that being able to talk about their

stress and being listened to was the best way to help them cope with stress. It seems that girls are already talking more than boys and that boys find this more difficult, some may perceive well meant enquiries into their well-being as interference by peers or teachers. It also appears that girls are more likely to notice stress in others, both boys and girls, and to worry about themselves and about others.

These differences in the ways boys and girls perceive their stress do reflect some well-established gender differences. Although an extensive discussion of gender is beyond the scope of this thesis, there are some points I wish to elaborate upon.

The assumptions made about male and female behavioural characteristics are well documented (Meighan 1986; Stanworth 1981; Riley 1994). Clarricoates (1980) describes how teachers typify 'girls as obedient, tidy, neat, conscientious, orderly, fussy, catty, bitchy, gossiping and boys as livelier, adventurous, aggressive, boisterous, self-confident, independent, energetic, couldn't care less and loyal' (Riley 1994).

The following summary of gender stereotyping was offered to the South Australian Sex Discrimination Board in 1981, but still serves to give a clear insight into 'modern gender stereotypes' (Whyld 1983) and clearly relates to the male and female characteristics described in my stress typologies:

'.....people who have minimal information about a person other than the sex of the person assume other characteristics. If the person is known to be male, then the stereotype characteristics which are assumed are aggression, assertiveness, problem-solving ability, initiative, decisiveness, unemotionality, interest in worldly matters, dominance, ambition, activity - including energy and enthusiasm, physical prowess and strength, leadership, business ability, and administration and the ability to deal with crisis. Similarly, if all that is known is that a person is female, then the characteristics which are assumed are nurturing, caring, submissiveness, low self-esteem, emotionality, lack of physical and psychological strength, attention to appearance, high verbality, low maths/science ability, low problem solving ability, non-ambition, non-assertiveness and a primary interest in domestic rather than worldly events.'

(Bettison 1981 in Whyld 1983 page 8).

The characteristics shared by females in the typologies and these assumed stereotypical characteristics are mainly those of nurturing and caring, low self-esteem and emotionality, high verbality and non-ambition; while males share in the main the characteristics of aggression and assertiveness, unemotionality and dominance, ambition and strength.

The difference in educational outcome and the low aspirations of girls is also well documented (Sharpe 1976; Weiner 1985; Riley 1994) and is similarly revealed in the stress typologies.

There are few, and some authorities believe no, innate behaviour differences between men and women to explain differences in educational outcome; any differences which do emerge are learned. We learn most of our ideas about gender initially from the family but it seems that schools reinforce, rather than challenge, the attitudes and assumptions concerning gender which the child brings to school. And rather than challenging pupils' aspirations of gender they emerge with their expectations of themselves and others in tact; so that girls follow the conventions of giving priority to domestic

responsibilities over careers and boys continue to assume the role of 'bread winner'. (See interviewees' expectations of their future on page 119). While the 'ambitions and hopes of girls tend to be circumscribed by domestic obligations, many boys emerge from full time education apparently unaware of familial and housekeeping responsibility' (Stanworth 1981).

Schools and individual teachers may not deliberately transmit attitudes and ideas which reinforce stereotyping, and they may be unaware that their attitudes 'encourage the development of quite different academic abilities and behaviours' (Serbin 1978) in their pupils. School is not the only source of influence on stereotyping and pupil expectation: television, films, teenage magazines, family and friends all transmit messages, subtle or otherwise, which reinforce pupil attitudes and assumptions about themselves and members of the opposite sex. In school, it is not only in the learning experiences offered to pupils but also 'the myriad of subtle ways in which the educational process brings to life and sustains sexual divisions' (Stanworth 1981).

Some of these 'subtle ways' include teaching materials, language, relationships and interactions, teachers' expectations and hierarchies and can all be considered as part of the school's hidden curriculum, as the messages are transmitted and the messages are learned, often unintended and unnoticed. (Further discussion of the impact of the hidden curriculum on pupils' stress can be found in Chapter 8).

Although most teachers would claim to treat boys and girls the same in the classroom, research has shown that this is not always the case (Spender 1978). It has been suggested that teachers have preconceived ideas and expectations of the ability, achievement and behaviour of boys and girls as mentioned earlier. These preconceptions begin at infant school, where they are often more pronounced as gender may be used more

for convenience in managing a class and maintaining discipline, for example, lining up according to sex and using sexual stereotypes to promote interest. They continue into secondary school, where they may be less overt but equally as powerful (Stanworth 1981). Children become 'programmed' in the classroom and learn that 'different characteristics, activities and behaviours are expected of males and females' and act accordingly. These messages, together with the powerful influence of home and the media, enforce traditional sexual stereotyping and maintains a self-fulfilling prophecy which clearly limits the potential of both boys and girls.

Research suggests that boys are more linguistically dominant in the classroom and the belief that girls talk more than boys has been disputed (Spender 1978; Meighan 1986). However, participants in my research largely felt, that where the subject of stress was concerned at least, girls talk about their feelings more openly than boys. It was felt by many (boys and girls) that boys 'keep it all inside' but almost unanimously the boys said that being able, or being allowed, to talk about their feelings was the best way to cope with the stress they experience.

It is difficult to estimate who copes with stress the most effectively from the perceptions of the pupils taking part in the research. It could be suggested that boys cope more effectively as they are more likely than girls to feel 'in control' of their stress yet they are unwilling (or unable) to share their feelings easily with others; girls on the other hand are less inhibited when talking about their own feelings and seem more empathetic towards peers feeling stressed, yet they lack feeling 'in control' when experiencing stress and may feel overwhelmed by their stress.

Amongst adults it is not very clear whether males or females cope better with stress. The huge variety of potential stressors and the range of individual responses to them makes

divisions according to male or female difficult; what is clearer is that women are statistically more likely than men to suffer from emotional disorders which may be stress related, whereas men are statistically more likely than women to suffer from physical, stress related symptoms such as heart attacks or stroke (Fontana 1989).

Fontana suggests that due to sexual stereotyping, males and females experience different stressors which elicit different stress responses:

'Women face far more stress in terms of poor status, uncertainty, powerlessness (which includes sexual harassment), and lack of variety (probably also time pressures, where these involve clashes between domestic and professional responsibilities). Men on the other hand face far more stress caused by unsociable hours, clashes with superiors, conflicts with colleagues, and job responsibilities. So far as responses to stress are concerned, women are usually allowed more scope for tears, withdrawal, absenteeism and weakness generally and men more scope for anger, aggression and self-assertion.'

(Fontana 1989 page 78).

Fontana suggests that these responses of women are 'flight' responses, whereas those of men are 'fight' responses; there is some agreement between these characteristics and the responses described for males and females in the stress typologies, which may suggest that these responses are learned in childhood and practiced in adult lives. This idea is supported by other research (Wolff 1976; Mills 1992). Mills suggests:

'Many of the personality and behavioural causes of stress in later life are now receiving more attention, as the effects of stress on the physical, mental and emotional health of adults are more widely recognised. But many of these originate in childhood....'

(Mills 1992 page 2).

Personality, rather than gender, may relate to an individual's experience of stress and their ability to cope. It has been suggested that a 'Type A' personality is more at risk of stress related disorders such as high blood pressure, coronary heart disease and stroke than a 'Type B' personality.

Type A personality was first defined as:

'.... a middle-class American male who has a chronic sense of time urgency, an excessive competitive drive and is prone to free-floating but extraordinarily well-rationalized hostility. He is always setting himself deadlines, has 'hurry sickness', cannot bear waiting his turn, has to do several things at once, is insecure about his status and needs the admiration of peers to bolster his self-esteem.'

(Friedman and Rosenman in Gross 1987 page 443).

More recently, Fontana describes the Type A personality as:

'..... competitive, hard-driving, impatient and rather inflexible in their approach. Heavily involved in their work, they like deadlines and pressures, prefer to lead rather than be led, and are more anxious for approval by superiors than peer approval. Though often unaware of being burdened by their work load they show little signs of sympathy towards themselves, and are no more tolerant with their own weaknesses than they are with those in other people.'

(Fontana 1989 page 70).

A longitudinal study (Rosenman et al 1975; Brand et al 1978) begun in 1960/1 described by Gross (1987) monitored the health of 3,000 men aged between 35 and 39 over an eight and half year period. It suggested:

'Type A men were two and a half times as likely to develop coronary heart disease as their Type B counterparts; when adjustments were made for traditional risk factors such as age, smoking, blood cholesterol, blood pressure, heart disease in the family, Type A men were still twice as likely to suffer heart attacks. These findings have been replicated in Sweden, Belgium, Honolulu, England, New Zealand and Canada.'

(Gross 1987 page 443).

In this research, stress is defined by the pupils who experience it and driven by their perceptions of stress. No assumptions were made as to the type of pupil who might experience stress, how they might feel or what causes them to feel stress. The idea of some personality types being more likely to experience stress than other personality types in some ways contradicts the nature of this particular research because it suggests that in some way stress may be innate, whereas this research presumes the stress experienced by the pupils taking part is somehow a result or product of their interaction with their school environment.

A further possible area of stress research in schools would be to ask pupils to offer a self-assessment of their personality, or give them a list of personality traits from which to select those which they think best describe themselves, to see if there is a relationship between their perceived levels of stress and their personality types. It would be worth considering whether some schools or some school's curricula encourage the development of Type A personalities. If such a relationship does exist and pupils and schools are aware of it and understand the possible long term implications for the health of pupils, perhaps stress and pupils' health would be taken more seriously as a whole school issue, about which the school is in a position to affect change. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 8.

CHAPTER SIX

THE 1994 QUESTIONNAIRE

There were surprisingly few differences between the findings of the 1993 questionnaire and the 1994 questionnaire. This questionnaire, rather than contributing towards new evidence of stress in school, corroborates the 1993 questionnaire, helping to build up a remarkably consistent picture of stress in the school as perceived by its pupils.

The questionnaire was issued for the second time during the first week of January 1994. No changes were made to the original questionnaire. The same procedure was followed as previously: staff were informed of the intended issue of the questionnaire during the weekly Monday morning Staff Meeting and their co-operation requested; the questionnaires were issued by Form Tutors to six volunteers, three male and three female, on the Monday morning and collected back in from registers by myself on the Friday afternoon.

The return of these questionnaires was not as high as in the previous year: 143 out of 180 issued were eventually returned. There are some possible explanations for this, none of which alone would adequately explain this difference between a 92% return in 1993 and the 79% return in 1994. Some factors worth noting include: Year 11 pupils began their 'mock' GCSE Examinations at the same time as the questionnaire was issued and this would explain why some of their questionnaires were not returned, although Year 11 pupils were not the worst year group for returning questionnaires in general; the beginning of the Spring Term at the school saw the arrival of several students on their final teaching practise all of whom took on a 'supporting' Form Tutor role, it is possible that some questionnaires were

not issued in some Tutor Groups or adequately 'chased' to ensure their return in others (the latter is certainly the case in one Tutor Group); a final possible explanation, and one that may be the most significant, is that pupils are becoming increasingly hostile towards questionnaires at the school.

The use of questionnaires is very common among pupils themselves in completing Humanities coursework, almost on a daily basis questionnaires appear in registers for Form Tutors to issue either to selected pupils or randomly. Some of these questionnaires are ill-conceived, badly presented or both and pupils generally, after Year 7, have grown tired and in some cases resentful of filling them in. I think this is a genuine grievance but it does not seem to deter the persistent pupil-researchers in the school who would perhaps benefit from more critical guidance when designing their questionnaires. I am not certain how much my own questionnaire suffered from this increasingly hardened attitude towards questionnaires from the pupils but in one case, a Year 9 Tutor Group, no volunteers were originally found to fill in the questionnaire. After persuasion from the Form Tutor, four volunteers were eventually found. However, this was not typical of the year group generally who in fact had the highest return of the questionnaire in the school.

Before moving on to discuss the results of the questionnaire it is worth mentioning briefly that a second piece of research, on the subject of bullying, has been conducted at the school using questionnaires to gather initial information; these questionnaires were issued approximately two months after my own and to every pupil in the school. At the same time, pupils in one Tutor Group decided to conduct questionnaire research on the same subject again issuing questionnaires to every pupil in the school. This unfortunate timing meant that both of these questionnaires were issued within one or two days of each other, or in some cases on the same day. Although in both cases the questionnaires were well prepared and

presented, their issue did cause considerable disruption and resentment from pupils and from some members of staff, who felt two questionnaires on the same subject within such a short space of time showed poor liaison between the researchers involved. The Tutor Group who had shown the most animosity towards my questionnaire, refused to fill in any of the subsequent questionnaires! The original intention had been a co-ordinated piece of research, although for different purposes, designed to be mutually beneficial. (Some of the results of these questionnaires are referred to in Chapter 8).

Although the return on my own questionnaire was not as good as the previous year, it was still filled in and returned by a substantial number of pupils. 36 questionnaires were issued to each year group with the instruction that it should not be filled in by any pupil who had previously volunteered. Of the 36, 31 were returned from Year 7; 28 from Year 8; 31 from Year 9; 24 from Year 10 and 29 from Year 11. Of these 65 or 46% were males, 76 or 53% were females and 2 failed to state whether they were male or female (both in year 7).

Of the 143 respondents, 134 agreed with the definition of stress provided on the questionnaire and 9 did not. This was considerably higher than the previous year when only 2 of the 167 respondents disagreed with the definition. Those who disagreed came from every year group, 5 were male and 4 female. All, but 1 male in Year 11, of those who disagreed with the definition offered their own alternative. These included:

'Stress is dangerous and possibly harmful and it can make you feel uncomfortable etc but I do not think it has any positive benefits.'

(Female Year 7).

'When you feel angry inside and you just need to cry, or need someone to speak to or are worried about something.'

(Female Year 8).

'When stressed you feel as if something is wrong.'

(Male Year 8).

'The view I have of stress is: stress is tension, and hard thoughts or decisions that a person experiences, which sometimes causes a nervous breakdown.'

(Male Year 9).

'I do think that stress makes us feel anxious, nervous, worried and frightened but it does not always cause physical harm.'

(Male Year 10).

'Stress makes us mentally uncomfortable but it is not a dangerous situation. It is personal and emotional. It does not physically harm you in any way. But I agree with everything else stated.'

(Female Year 11)

The male who disagreed with the definition but did not suggest an alternative qualified this by saying that he had never been 'stressed out'.

The second question asked respondents if they had ever experienced stress. Of the 141 respondents who answered this question, 6 or 4% said that they had 'never' felt stress; 90 or 66% said that they 'occasionally' felt stress; 38 or 27% said that they 'often' felt stress and 4 or 3% said that they 'always' felt stress. In total 96% of respondents said that they

either 'always', 'often' or 'occasionally' felt stress, compared to 91% the previous year.

(Figure 19)

FIGURE 19

NEVER	6	4%
OCCASIONALLY	90	66%
OFTEN	38	27%
ALWAYS	4	3%

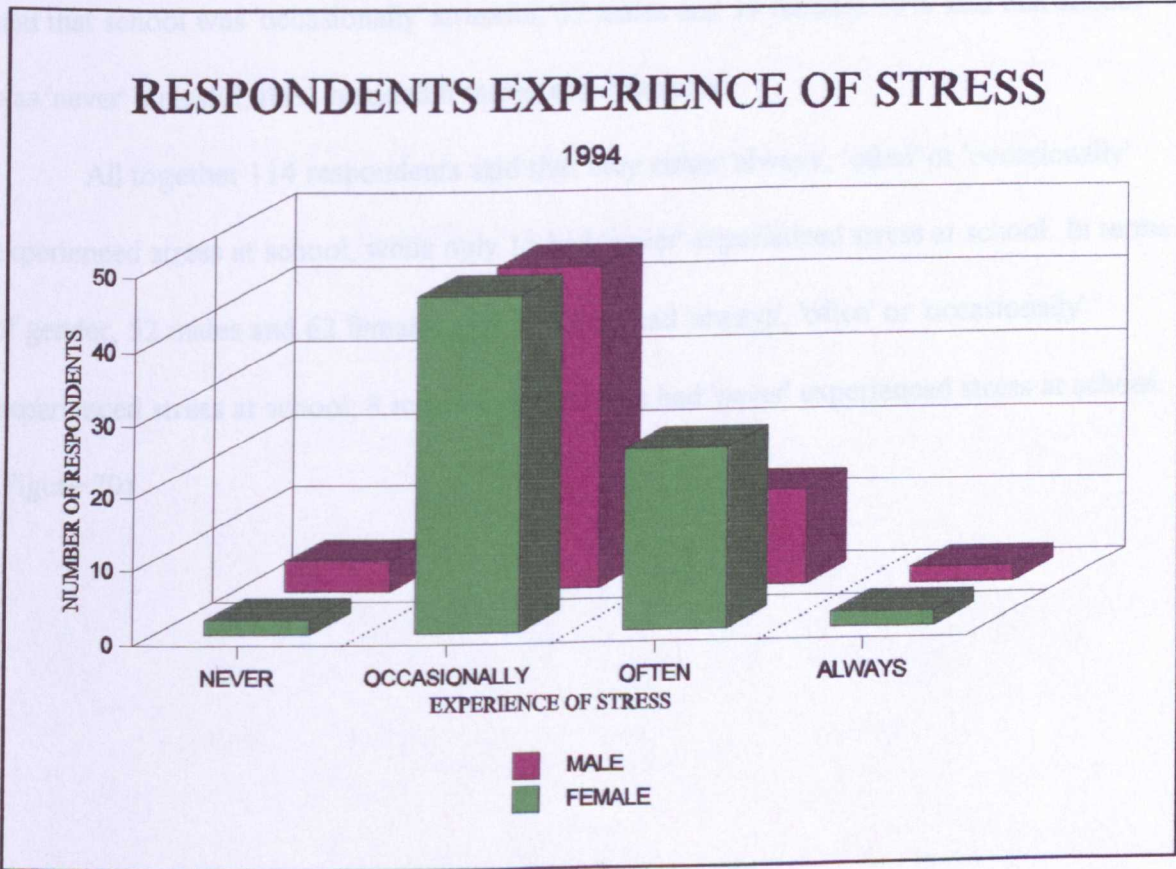


Figure 19

Question 3 asked respondents where they experienced this stress: at home, at school, with friends or when alone. 73% said their stress was experienced at home; 78% said that it was experienced at school; 53% said they experienced stress with their friends and 50% said they felt stress when alone. These figures, when compared to those in 1993,

show that almost exactly the same percentage of respondents said that they experience stress when alone, with friends or at home; 4% more were experiencing stress at school.

Of those respondents who said that they experienced stress at school, 5% or 7 respondents said that school was 'always' stressful for them; 4 males and 3 females. 22% or 31 respondents said that school was 'often' stressful for them; 11 male and 20 female. 53% said that school was 'occasionally' stressful; 37 males and 39 females. 10% said that school was 'never' stressful; this included 8 males and 7 females.

All together 114 respondents said that they either 'always', 'often' or 'occasionally' experienced stress at school, while only 15 had 'never' experienced stress at school. In terms of gender, 52 males and 62 females said that they had 'always', 'often' or 'occasionally' experienced stress at school; 8 males and 7 females had 'never' experienced stress at school. (Figure 20).

FIGURE 20

	MALE	FEMALE	%
NEVER	8	7	10%
OCCASIONALLY	37	39	53%
OFTEN	11	20	22%
ALWAYS	4	3	5%

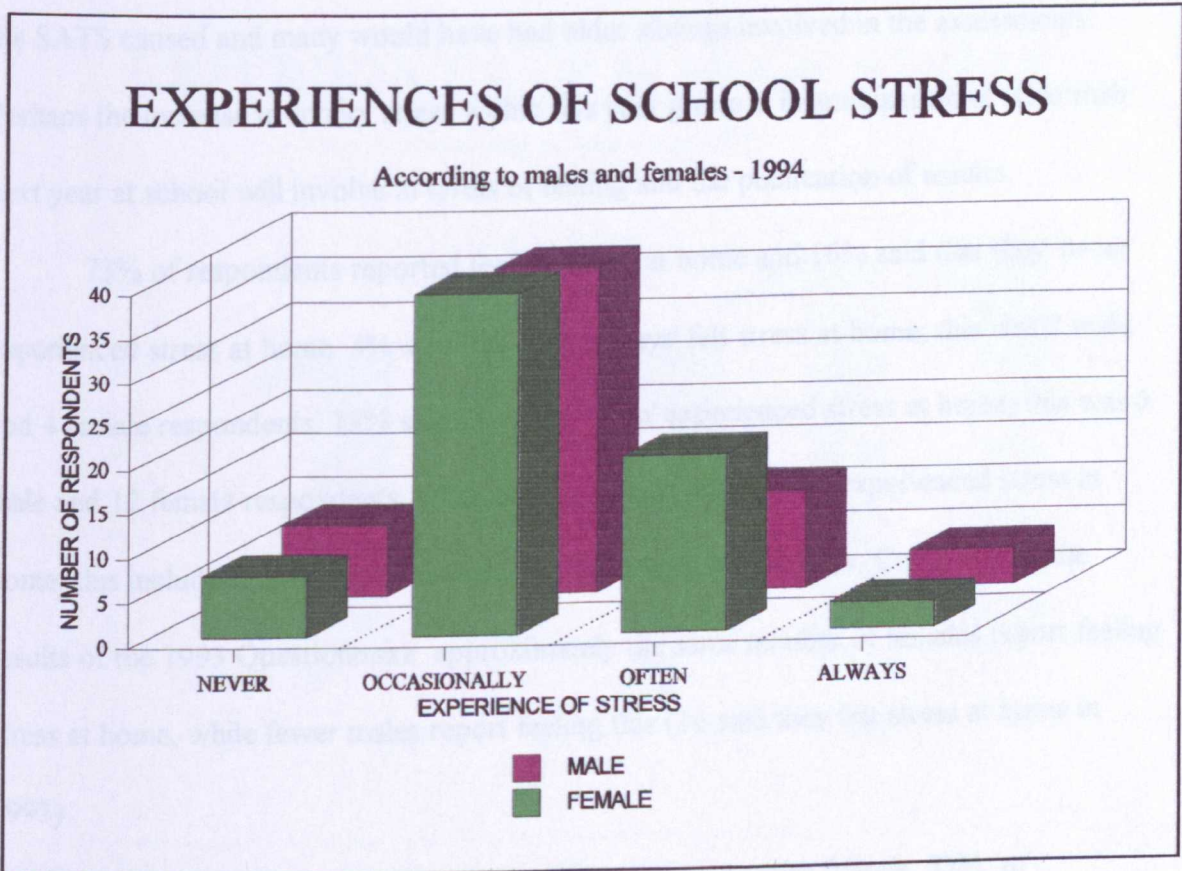


Figure 20

If these figures are considered in terms of year groups: 68% of year 7 pupils; 82% of Year 8 pupils; 68% of year 9 pupils; 88% of Year 10 pupils and 90% of Year 11 pupils answering the questionnaire said that they either 'always', 'often' or 'occasionally' felt stress at school. (Figure 21). These figures remain consistent with those of the 1993 questionnaire

for Years 9, 10 and 11, but show an increase in Years 7 and 8. An increase of 5% in Year 7 and 22% in Year 8.

One possible explanation for the sharp increase in Year 8 could be the high profile of the SATS during 1993 when they were in Year 7. Pupils in the school participated in 'pilot' versions of these assessments in both 1993 and 1994 so this particular cohort of pupils would have been quite aware of the disruptions to various Faculties within the school the SATS caused and many would have had older siblings involved in the assessments. Perhaps the increase in school stress within this year group is in anticipation of what their next year at school will involve in terms of testing and the publication of results.

73% of respondents reported feeling stress at home and 16% said that they 'never' experienced stress at home. 4% said that they 'always' felt stress at home; this was 2 male and 4 female respondents. 13% said that they 'often' experienced stress at home; this was 6 male and 12 female respondents. 56% said that they 'occasionally' experienced stress at home; this includes 25 male respondents and 44 female respondents. Compared to the results of the 1993 Questionnaire approximately the same number of females report feeling stress at home, while fewer males report feeling this (16 said they felt stress at home in 1993).

When asked whether or not they experienced stress with friends, 53% of respondents said that they did while 33% said that they had 'never' experienced this. Only 1 female respondent said that she 'always' felt stress with her friends. 6% of respondents said that they 'often' experienced stress with their friends; 2 males and 7 females. 46% of respondents said that they 'occasionally' felt stress with their friends; 29 males and 36 females. Comparing these figures to the previous year's, approximately the same number of

males report feeling stress with their friends while the figure for females is slightly less (8 in 1993).

FIGURE 21

YEAR 7	YEAR 8	YEAR 9	YEAR 10	YEAR 11
68%	82%	68%	88%	90%

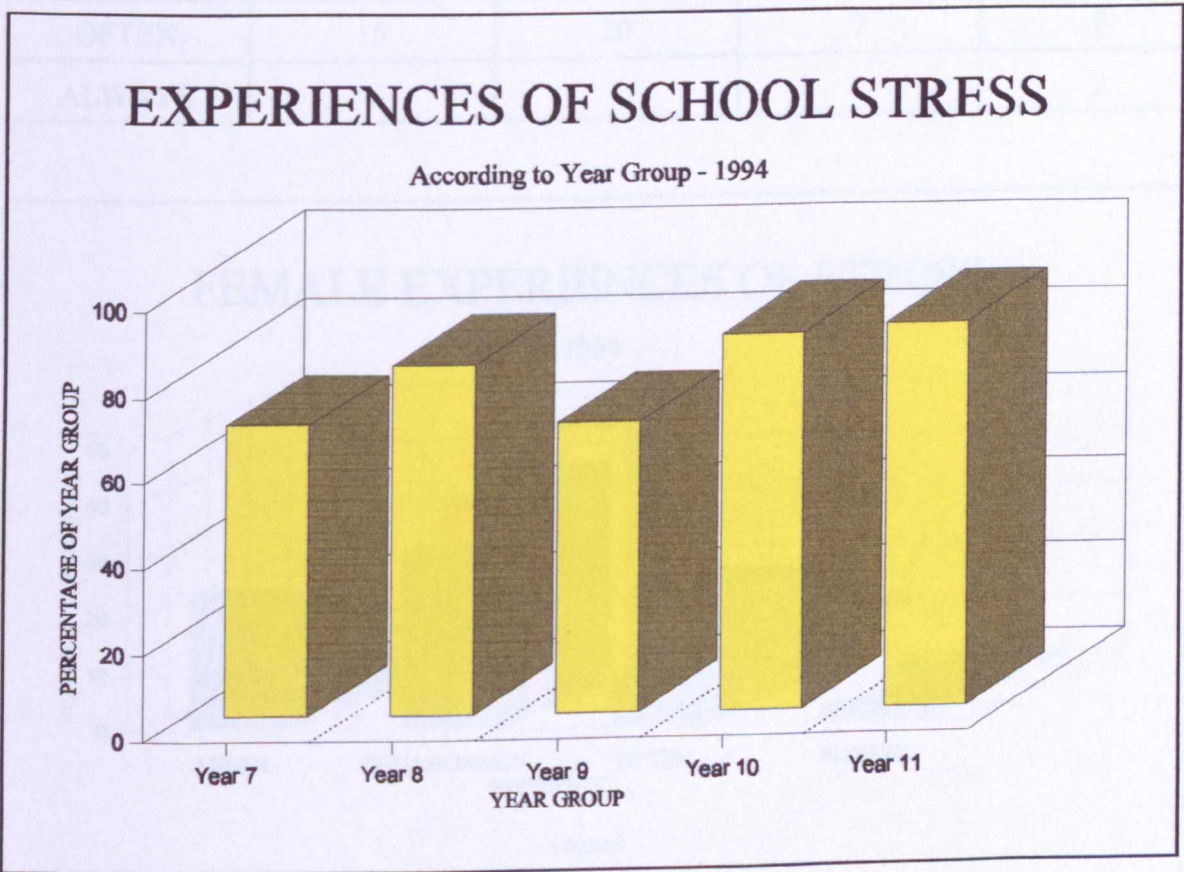


Figure 21

50% of respondents reported feeling stress when alone while 36% said that they never experienced this. Only 2 females said that this was something that they 'always' experienced. 11%, 8 males and 8 females, said that they 'often' experienced stress when alone. 36% said that they 'occasionally' experienced stress when alone, this was made up of

20 males and 31 females. Comparing these figures to those of last year, both males and females are reporting feeling less stress when alone. (Figure 22).

FIGURE 22 (Female)

	HOME	SCHOOL	FRIENDS	ALONE
NEVER	8	7	19	23
OCCASION'Y	44	39	36	31
OFTEN	15	20	7	8
ALWAYS	1	3	1	2

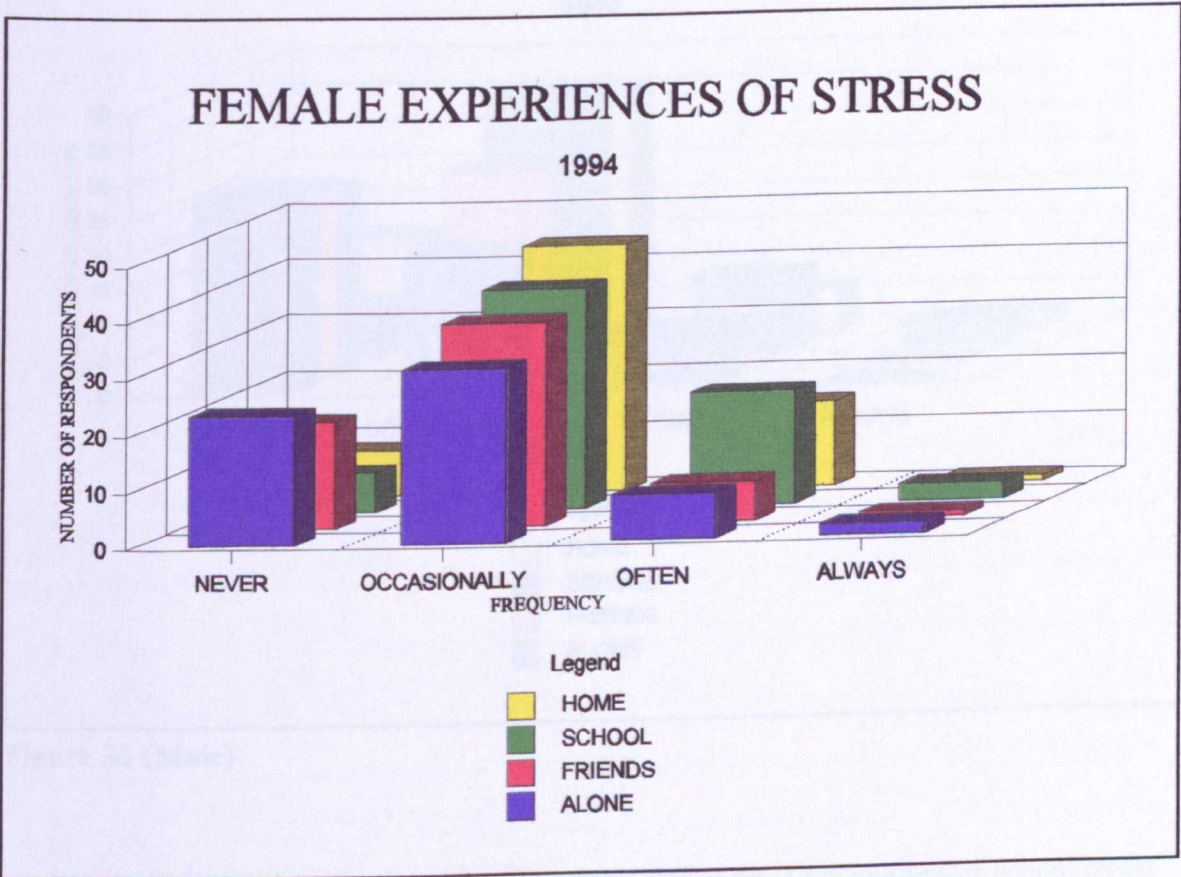


Figure 22 (Female)

FIGURE 23 (Male)

	HOME	SCHOOL	FRIENDS	ALONE
NEVER	15	8	27	28
OCCASION'Y	35	37	29	20
OFTEN	6	11	2	8
ALWAYS	2	4	0	0

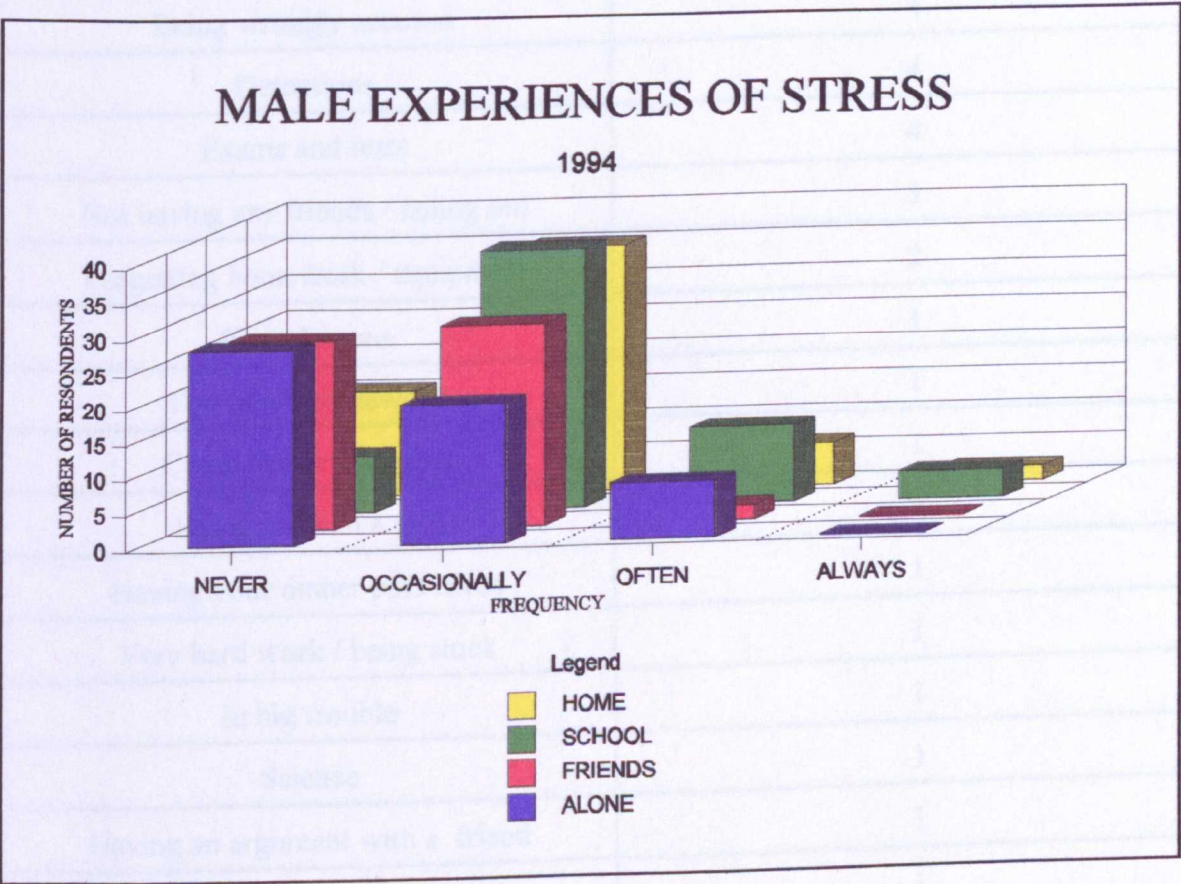


Figure 23 (Male)

The next group of questions explored the respondents perceptions of school stress in more detail. The situations in school described as being stressful, and the feelings associated with those situations have been listed according to year group. The respondents' own words have been used throughout.

***SITUATIONS YEAR 7 PUPILS PERCEIVE AS STRESSFUL IN
SCHOOL AND THE NUMBER OF TIMES THEY WERE
MENTIONED***

Being picked on / bullied	6
Not understanding the work set	5
Being wrongly accused	4
Detentions	4
Exams and tests	4
Not having any friends / falling out	3
Forgetting homework / equipment	2
Piano lessons	1
Too much homework	1
Cross country running	1
Being stuck in a test	1
Having your dinner pass taken	1
Very hard work / being stuck	1
In big trouble	1
Science	1
Having an argument with a friend	1
P.E.	1
Not understanding a teacher	1
Being with people you do not know	1
Standing up in front of the class	1
Being told off	1

***FEELINGS YEAR 7 PUPILS ASSOCIATE WITH THESE
SITUATIONS AND THE NUMBER OF TIMES THEY WERE
MENTIONED***

Worried	6
Scared	5
Angry	5
Nervous	4
Upset	3
Lonely	3
Unhappy	3
Nasty	2
Frightened	2
Sick	2
Tearful	2
Tight	1
Irritable	1
Fed-up	1
Annoyed	1
Dizzy	1
Anxious	1
Tense	1
Under pressure	1
Panic	1
Hurt inside	1
Afraid	1
Weird	1
Disappointed	1

Frustrated	1
Hot	1
Depressed	1
Down in the dumps	1
Gets me down	1
Drained of energy	1
As if I'm going to collapse	1
Why does this happen to me?	1
As if a big weight has been dropped on me	1
Like nobody cares and I might as well not be here	1

***SITUATIONS YEAR 8 PUPILS PERCEIVE AS STRESSFUL IN
SCHOOL AND THE NUMBER OF TIMES THEY WERE
MENTIONED***

Tests and exams	12
Homework	4
Bullying	3
Being told off	2
Being left out	2
Not being able to do the work	1
Having no friends	1
Falling out with friends	1
Knowing you are going to be told off	1
Sporting occasions	1
Cookery	1
Revision	1
P.E.	1
Drama	1
Detention	1

***FEELINGS YEAR 8 PUPILS ASSOCIATE WITH THESE
FEELINGS AND THE NUMBER OF TIMES THEY WERE
MENTIONED***

Frightened	5
Nervous	4
Angry	3
Tense	2
Worried	2
Irritable	2
Annoyed	2
Moody	2
Very depressed	2
Upset	2
Bad tempered	1
Uncomfortable	1
Alone	1
Pressurised - but challenged	1
I feel I can't do anything to please anyone	1
Butterflies in the tummy	1
Bored	1
Mad	1
Worked-up	1
Quiet	1
Fed-up	1
Can't be bothered	1
Faster breathing and heart beat	1
Shout at / be cheeky to my Mum	1

Unhappy	1
Puzzled	1

***SITUATIONS YEAR 9 PUPILS PERCEIVE AS STRESSFUL IN
SCHOOL AND THE NUMBER OF TIMES THEY WERE
MENTIONED***

Tests and exams	14
Bullying	6
Rejection / when friends disagree	6
Teasing	4
Hard work / pressure of work	3
Not understanding the work	2
Pressure from teachers or friends	2
Homework	2
Poor results	1
When teachers pick on pupils	1
Home problems brought into school	1
Lads	1
Being embarrassed	1
Meeting new teachers	1
Teachers	1
Detentions	1
Out of school activities	1
Getting into trouble	1
Making decisions	1
Reading aloud	1
Not doing well	1

***FEELINGS YEAR 9 PUPILS ASSOCIATE WITH THESE
SITUATIONS AND THE NUMBER OF TIMES THEY WERE
MENTIONED***

Upset	5
Nervous	4
Fed-up	4
Angry	3
Bored	3
Miserable	3
Down	3
Moody	3
Worried	3
Snappy	2
Tense	2
Want to be alone	2
Wound-up	2
Frightened	2
Unhappy	2
Threatened	2
Anxious	2
As if no one likes me	2
Headache	2
Hot and sweaty	1
Irritated	1
Annoyed	1
On edge	1
Unable to relax	1

Suicidal	1
Murderous	1
Don't want to talk	1
Depressed	1
Physically sick	1
Ill	1
Distressed	1
Spaced out	1
Lonely	1
Feel like fighting	1
Mad	1
Bad tempered	1
Unwanted	1
Tearful	1
I do things I can't remember	1

***SITUATIONS YEAR 10 PUPILS PERCEIVE AS STRESSFUL
IN SCHOOL AND THE NUMBER OF TIMES THEY WERE
MENTIONED***

Tests and exams	7
Bullying	7
Losing friends / falling out	4
Finding work hard	3
Homework	3
Deadlines	3
Teachers	2
Having to give a talk	2
Pupils	1
Boring lessons	1
Revision	1
Boyfriend problems	1
Parents	1
Oral lessons	1
Being told off when you haven't done it	1
Being in the wrong group	1
Football	1
Science	1
Coursework	1
Being made fun of	1
Going to school	1

***FEELINGS YEAR 10 PUPILS ASSOCIATE WITH THESE
SITUATIONS AND THE NUMBER OF TIMES THEY WERE
MENTIONED***

Anxious	5
Worried	4
Confused	4
Tired	2
Angry	2
Upset	2
Suicidal	2
Pressured	2
Alone	2
Irritable	2
Frustrated	2
Embarrassed	2
Nervous	2
Sad	2
Depressed	2
Tearful	2
As if the whole World's against me	2
Can't be bothered	1
Trapped	1
Screwed-up	1
Low	1
Unloved	1
Down in the dumps	1
Emotional	1

Uncomfortable	1
Fidgety	1
Unable to concentrate	1
Wanting to talk	1
Aggressive	1
Short-tempered	1
Unhappy	1
Uptight	1
Down	1

***SITUATIONS YEAR 11 PUPILS PERCEIVE AS STRESSFUL
IN SCHOOL AND THE NUMBER OF TIMES THEY WERE
MENTIONED***

Tests and exams	22
Homework / deadlines	11
Bullying	6
Coursework	4
Falling out / arguing	3
Teachers	3
Being in trouble	3
Other pupils	2
Build-up to exams	2
Falling out with boyfriend / girlfriend	2
Reading aloud / performing	2
Dinners	1
Not being able to smoke	1
Being in the top set / competition	1
Not knowing where I stand with people	1
Being picked on	1
What different people think of me	1
Leaving school / jobs / college	1
Clothes	1
Travelling to school	1
P.E.	1
Spots	1
Singing solo	1
Life	1

The future	1
Boys	1
Lessons	1

***FEELINGS YEAR 11 PUPILS ASSOCIATE WITH THESE
SITUATIONS AND THE NUMBER OF TIMES THEY WERE
MENTIONED***

Worried	6
Depressed	6
Angry	5
Tearful	4
Nervous	4
Confused	3
Anxious	3
Upset	2
Lonely	2
Panic - as if I want to walk out	2
Emotional	2
Scared	2
Frustrated	2
Annoyed	2
Tense	2
Vicious	1
Frightened	1
Shaky	1
Very self-conscious	1
Heart rate increases	1
A mess in my appearance	1
Tired	1
Lousy	1
Ill	1

Worked-up	1
Insecure	1
Uncomfortable	1
Quick tempered	1
Want to be alone	1
Knotted-up inside	1
Down	1
Irritable	1
Mad	1
Butterflies in my stomach	1
Helpless	1

The stressors, and the feelings and emotions associated with them, fell into the same categories I had identified from the previous year's data. Those categories are: relationships with peers (including bullying); relationships with teachers (including any 'disciplinary' stressors); relationships with family members; curriculum generated stressors and a miscellaneous group of everyday life stressors.

This information generated very similar findings to those of the previous year. In every year group, curriculum generated stressors was by far the largest category with relationships with peers being the second largest.

Tests and exams were the most frequently mentioned curriculum generated stressors. They were identified four times by Year 7 pupils, twelve times by Year 8 pupils, fourteen times by Year 9 pupils, seven times by Year 10 pupils and twenty times by Year 11 pupils. On the 1993 Questionnaire tests and exams had been mentioned less frequently by most year groups. They were mentioned five times by Year 7 pupils, six times by Year 8 pupils, twelve times by Year 9 pupils, eleven times by Year 10 pupils and thirteen times by Year 11 pupils. The largest increases are in Years 8 and 11.

The largest increase in school stress generally was noted earlier to be in Year 8. The possible explanation suggested that the SATS may have some influence on this seems to be born out by these figures. It is also interesting to note that the Year 11 respondents to the 1994 Questionnaire, twenty out of twenty four of whom mentioned tests and exams as curriculum generated stressors, are among the first cohort of pupils to have experience of both SATS and the increased amount of examination assessment at key stage 4. Their predecessors, in 1993, had mentioned coursework and deadlines most frequently as stressors in the curriculum generated category.

***The number of occasions tests and exams were cited as stressors in
each year group***

	YEAR 7	YEAR 8	YEAR 9	YEAR 10	YEAR 11
1993	5	6	12	11	13
1994	4	12	14	7	22

In the category relating to relationships with peers, bullying was the most frequently mentioned stressor. Again, this stressor was mentioned more frequently than in the previous year's questionnaire. In 1994 bullying was mentioned six times by Year 7 pupils compared with five times in 1993; three times by Year 8 pupils in both 1994 and 1993; six times by Year 9 pupils in 1994 compared to twice in 1993; Year 10 pupils mentioned bullying on seven occasions in 1994 and 4 in 1993, and finally Year 11 pupils mentioned it six times in 1994 and only twice in 1993.

***The number of occasions bullying was cited as a stressor in each
year group***

	YEAR 7	YEAR 8	YEAR 9	YEAR 10	YEAR 11
1993	4	3	2	4	2
1994	6	3	6	7	6

I am unable to offer a satisfactory explanation for this increase. I mentioned earlier in this chapter that another member of staff at the school was conducting a piece of school-based research on bullying using a questionnaire, however, that questionnaire was issued after my own and could not have influenced answers.

Perhaps increased media interest demonstrated in the coverage of isolated tragic incidents of bullying by the national press and on television, for example the case of Katherine Bamber in March 1992 and that of Stephen Woodhall in March 1993, has served to keep bullying on everyone's agenda. Both Katherine Bamber and Stephen Woodhall committed suicide after allegedly being bullied at their respective schools. Esther Rantzen featured Katherine Bamber's story in her BBC programme 'That's Life' and launched a national anti-bullying campaign as a result. Respondent's answers could have been influenced by this sort of media coverage or it could be that for them, at the time of answering the questionnaire, bullying was perceived as a bigger issue in the school than it was perceived to be by the respondents the previous year.

The following pie charts show the frequency each category of stressor was mentioned in each year group.

FIGURE 24

Relationships with peers	11
Relationships with teachers	11
Relationships with family members	0
Curriculum generated stressors	19
Every day life stressors	1

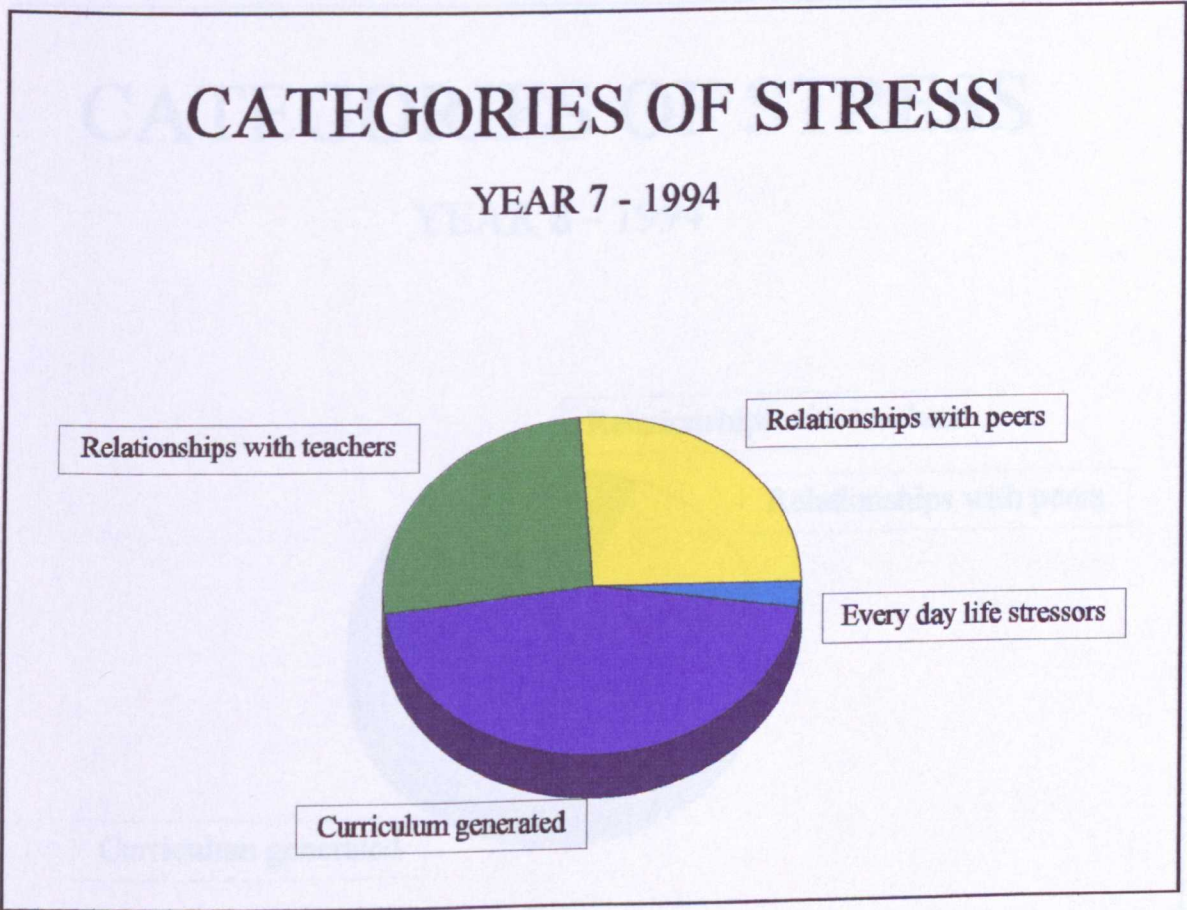


Figure 24

FIGURE 25

Relationships with peers	6
Relationships with teachers	4
Relationships with family members	0
Curriculum generated stressors	22
Every day life stressors	0

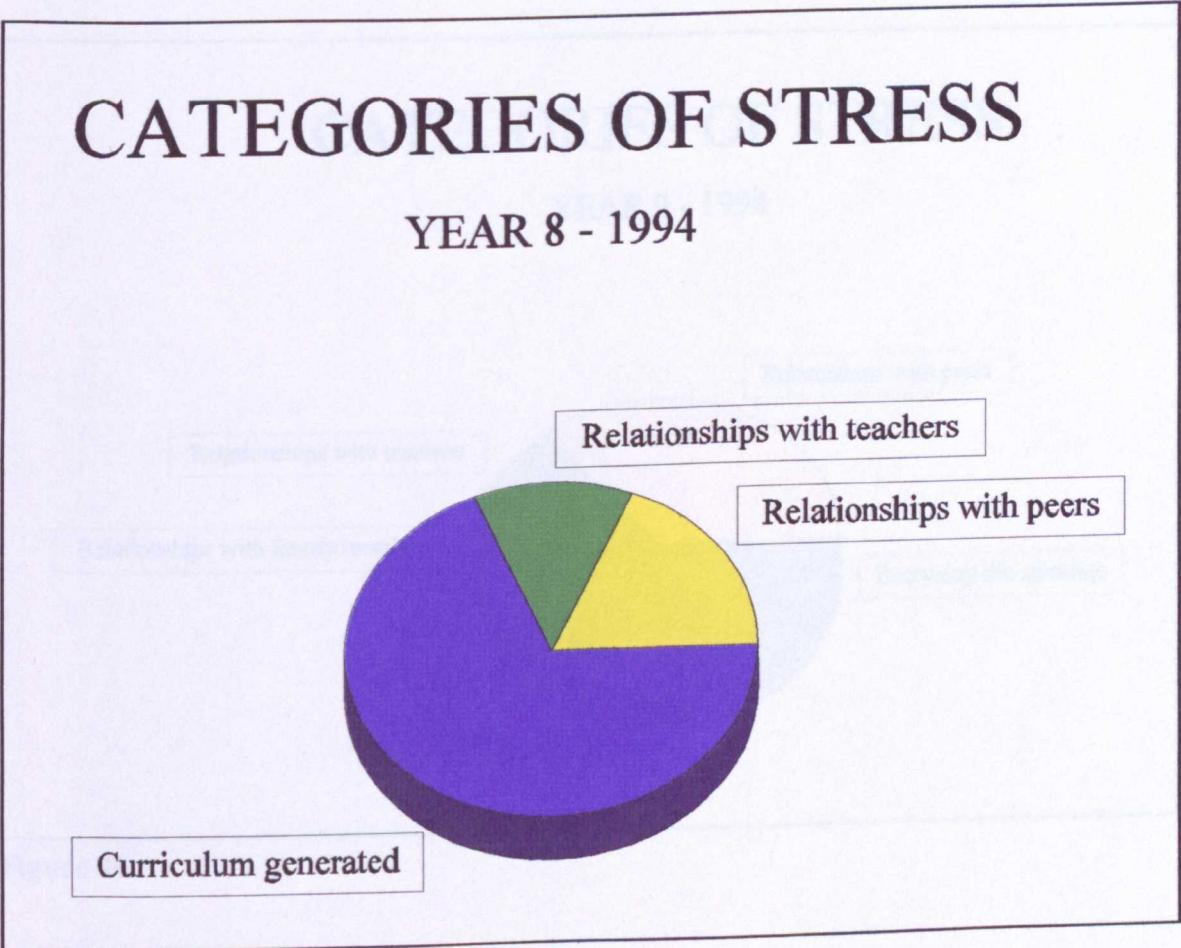


Figure 25

FIGURE 26

Relationships with peers	19
Relationships with teachers	7
Relationships with family members	1
Curriculum generated stressors	24
Every day life stressors	2

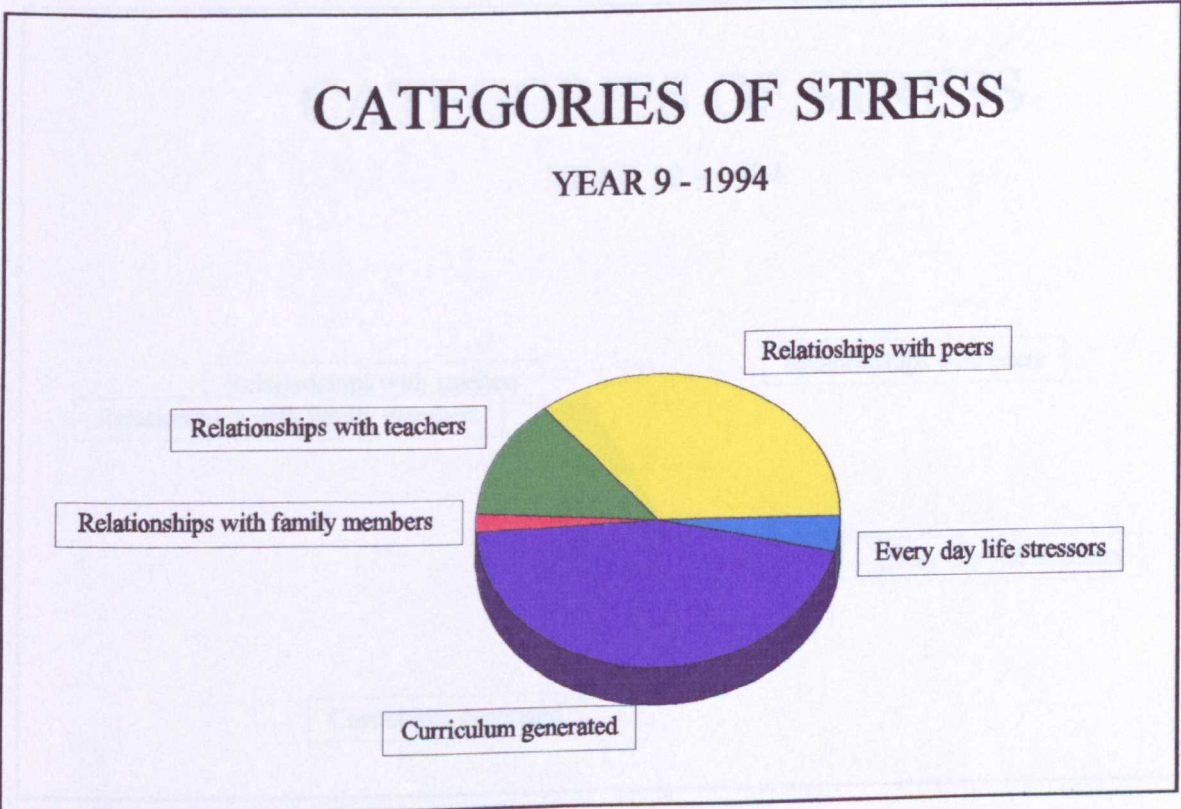


Figure 26

FIGURE 27

Relationships with peers	14
Relationships with teachers	3
Relationships with family members	1
Curriculum generated stressors	23
Every day life stressors	2

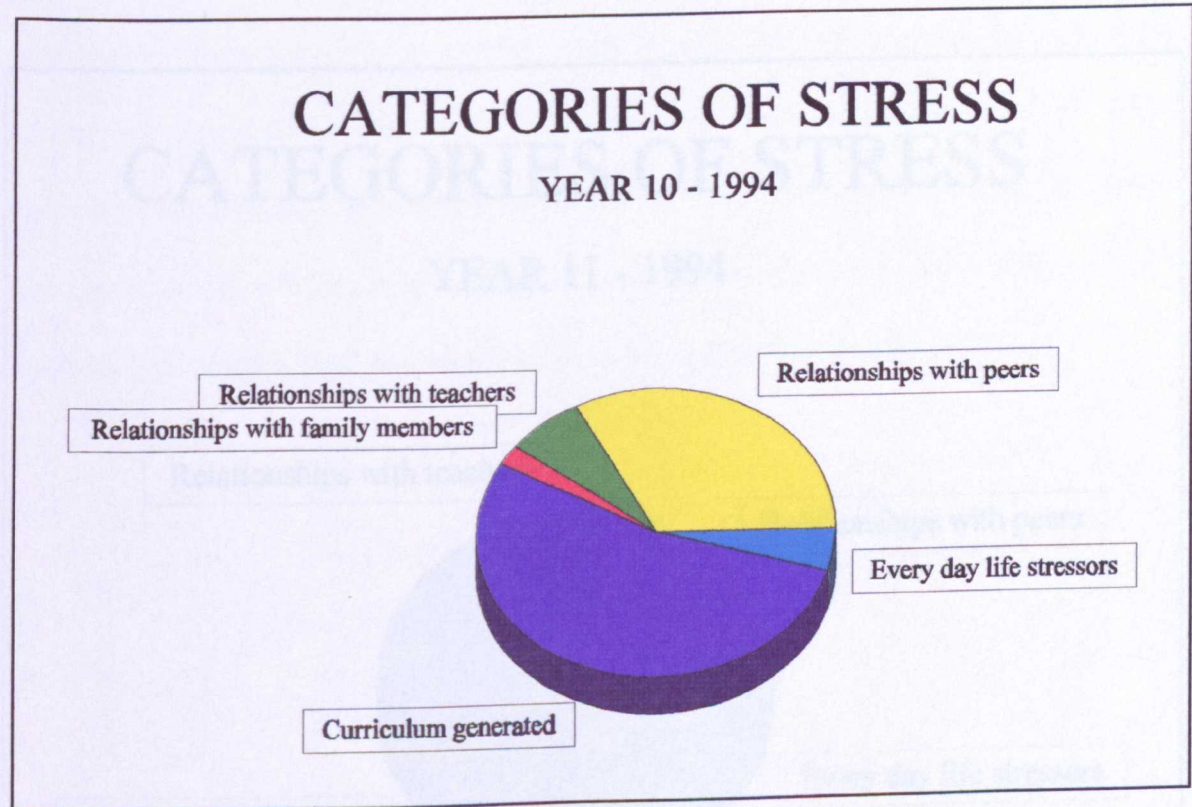


Figure 27

FIGURE 28

Relationships with peers	17
Relationships with teachers	6
Relationships with family members	0
Curriculum generated stressors	43
Every day life stressors	9

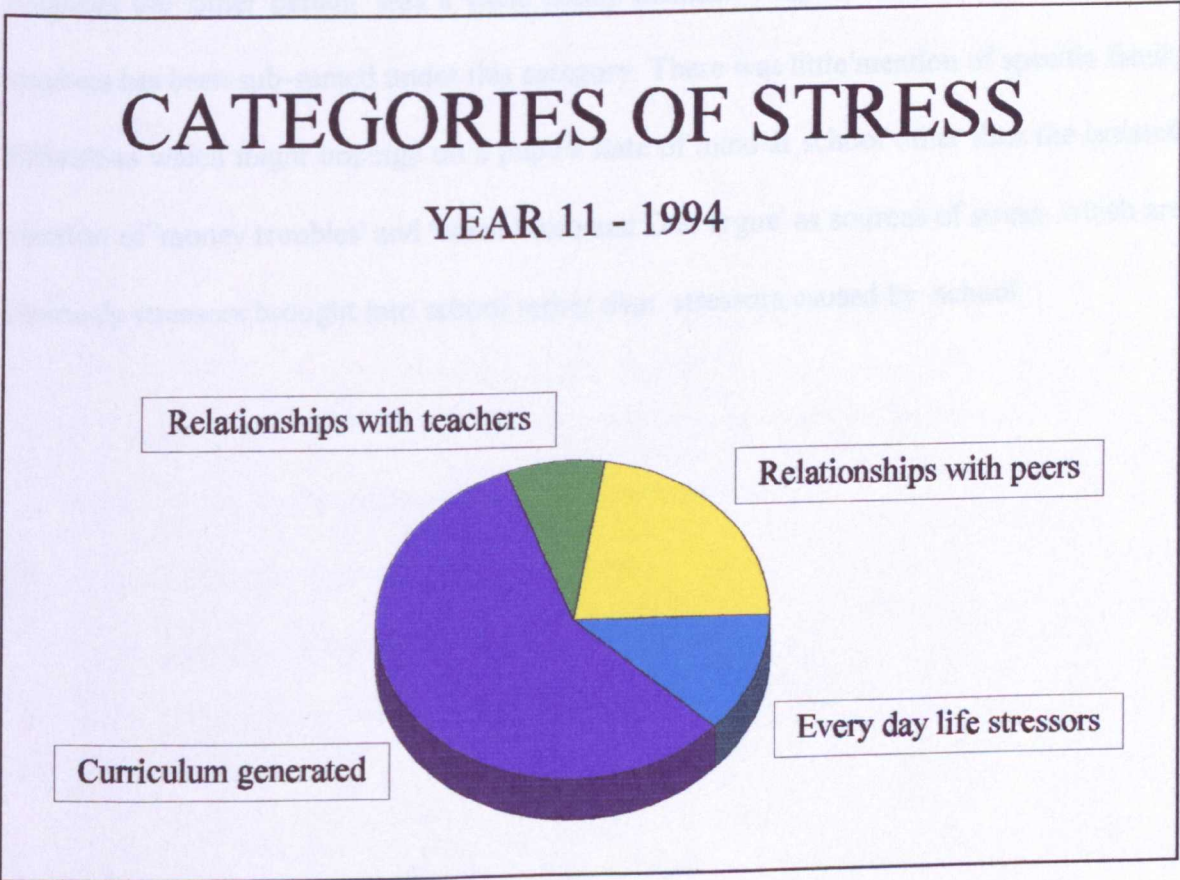


Figure 28

Figure 29 shows all categories of stress for all year groups for both 1993 and 1994. I have already discussed the changing patterns which occur in the mention of tests and exams, and bullying over the two years. It is also interesting to note how relationships with family members seems to have so little importance in the questionnaire data, when the interview data found this to be more problematic for some pupils. However, under the category of curriculum generated stressors, I did include 'other people's expectations' as a stressor and in most instances the 'other person' was a close family member. Maybe, relationships with family members has been sub-sumed under this category. There was little mention of specific family difficulties which might impinge on a pupil's state of mind at school other than the isolated mention of 'money troubles' and 'when Mum and Dad argue' as sources of stress, which are obviously stressors brought into school rather than stressors caused by school.

FIGURE 29

	YEAR 7	YEAR 8	YEAR 9	YEAR 10	YEAR 11
Every day life stressors	3	1	3	4	13
Curriculum generated	38	39	52	69	91
Relationships with family	1	1	1	4	3
Relationships with teachers	18	12	19	5	7
Relationships with peers	27	17	30	30	22

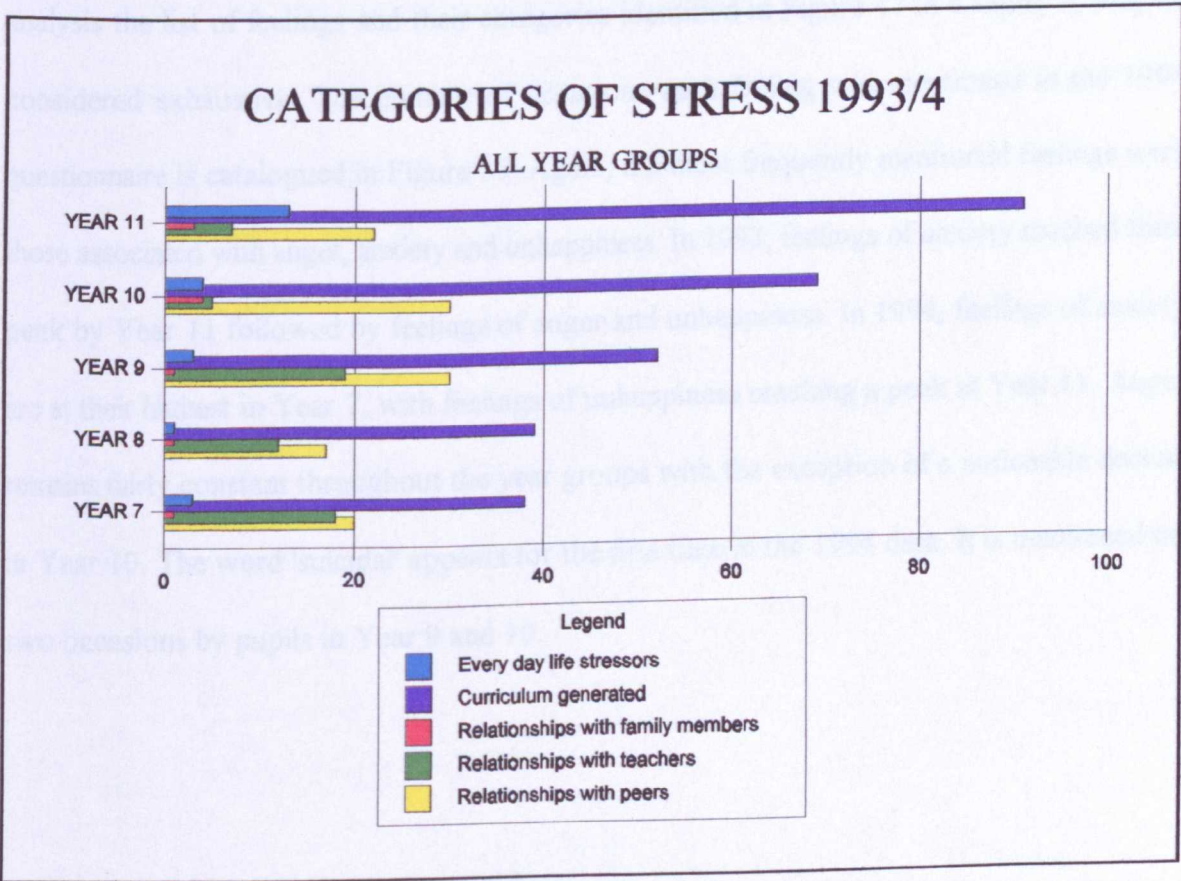


Figure 29

It is also interesting to note that relationships with teachers seems to cause more stress to Lower School pupils. Stereotypical images of life in a secondary school might suggest the opposite and certainly television and the media promote this idea. Many secondary school teachers would probably endorse the idea too. But from the data collected in the questionnaire it would seem that Upper School pupils have fewer grievances with the staff who teach them, than with the 'what' and 'how' they are taught.

The feelings respondents associated with these stressors were again categorised under the same six headings identified from the 1993 questionnaire. There was little variation in the range of feelings identified in the second questionnaire and in the first. For the purpose of this analysis the list of feelings and their categories identified in Figure 17 in Chapter 4, may be considered exhaustive. The number of occasions each feeling was mentioned in the 1994 questionnaire is catalogued in Figure 30. Again, the most frequently mentioned feelings were those associated with anger, anxiety and unhappiness. In 1993, feelings of anxiety reached their peak by Year 11 followed by feelings of anger and unhappiness. In 1994, feelings of anxiety are at their highest in Year 7, with feelings of unhappiness reaching a peak in Year 11. Anger remains fairly constant throughout the year groups with the exception of a noticeable decline in Year 10. The word 'suicidal' appears for the first time in the 1994 data. It is mentioned on two occasions by pupils in Year 9 and 10.

THE NUMBER OF TIMES EACH CATEGORY OF FEELING WAS MENTIONED ACCORDING TO YEAR GROUP

FIGURE 30

	YEAR 7	YEAR 8	YEAR 9	YEAR 10	YEAR 11
ANGER	12	11	17	8	14
ANXIOUS	22	15	18	17	17
UNHAPPY	13	10	17	18	21
BORED	2	3	7	3	2
PHYSICAL	9	2	5	5	6
PERSONAL	4	2	5	7	5

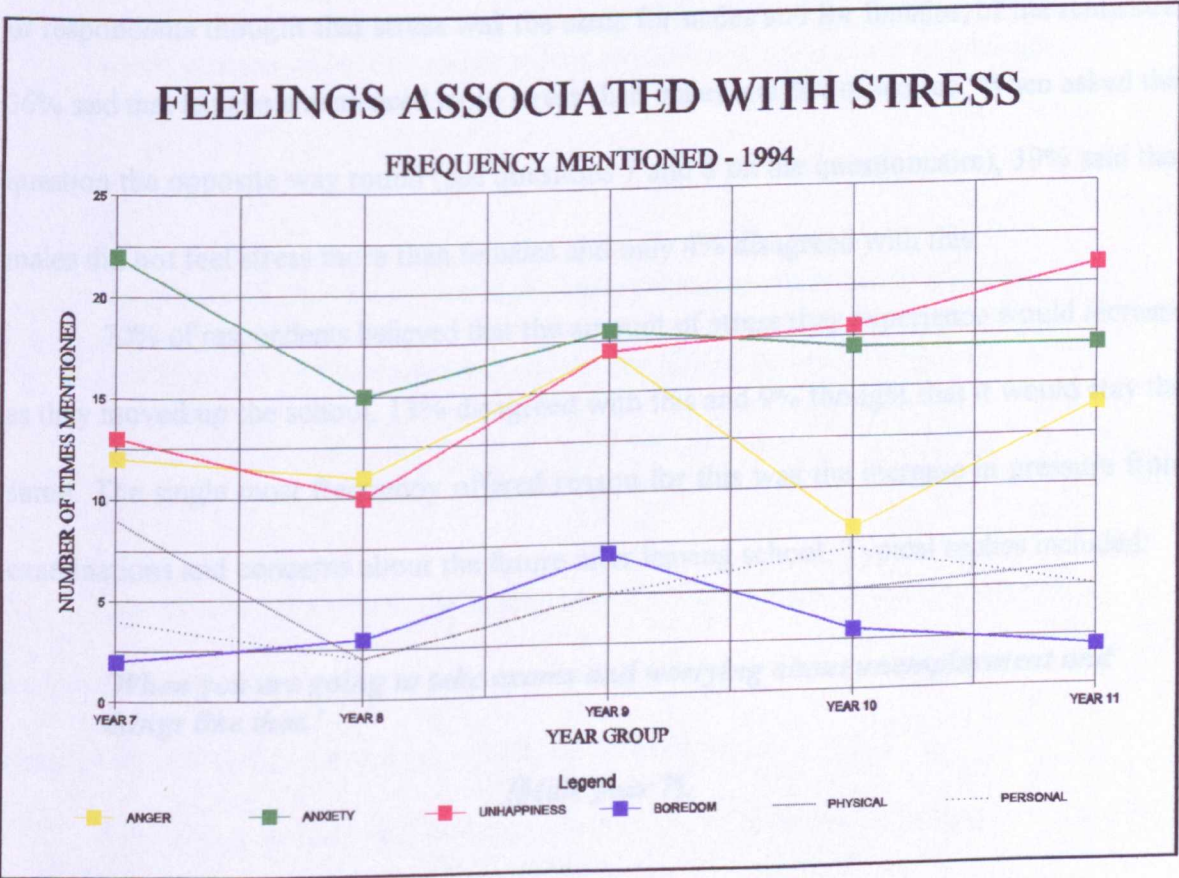


Figure 30

The next group of questions aimed to discover the extent of school stress as perceived by the respondents to the questionnaire. The figures were again similar to those of the previous year. 19% of respondents thought 'all' pupils suffered from school stress; 21% believed that 'many' pupils experienced school stress; 30% believed 'quite a few' pupils felt stress and 18% thought that 'a few' would feel this way. None of the respondents thought that pupils never experienced school stress. In total, 96% of the respondents thought that all pupils experienced school stress to varying degrees at some point during their school life. In 1993, 98% of respondents thought this.

Nearly half of the respondents thought that males and females experienced similar amounts of stress which again, is remarkably similar to data from the 1993 questionnaire. 52% of respondents thought that stress was the same for males and for females; of the remainder 36% said that females experienced more stress than males and 6% disagreed. When asked this question the opposite way round (see questions 7 and 8 on the questionnaire), 39% said that males did not feel stress more than females and only 4% disagreed with this.

70% of respondents believed that the amount of stress they experience would increase as they moved up the school, 13% disagreed with this and 9% thought that it would stay the same. The single most frequently offered reason for this was the increase in pressure from examinations and concerns about the future after leaving school. Typical replies included:

'When you are going to take exams and worrying about unemployment and things like that.'

(Male year 7).

'As you get older you worry more about your school work and exams and also what you are going to do when you leave school. Boyfriends can also cause problems.'

(Female year 7).

'The exams are a lot harder and you have to do well to get a good job. It causes a lot of stress doing them.'

(Male year 8).

'As you move up the school there's more pressure put on you on things like handing in homework and doing your exams.'

(Female year 9).

'As you change, there will be different things which cause you stress, eg. when you are younger you might worry about friends or a new school but when you are older you might worry about work, exams and boyfriends and girlfriends.'

(Male year 10).

'Lower down the school you'd probably be under stress because of the petty things like falling out with friends, but once you get to upper school you're so worried about exams that other things seem trivial by comparison!'

(Female year 11).

One or two respondents did make the point that as pupils became older and increased in maturity, they became more proficient at handling situations and therefore reduced the amount of stress they were likely to experience.

59% of respondents said that they were aware of their friends feeling stressed and when asked how they could tell mentioned 'symptoms' such as moodiness, tearfulness, looking pale and tense, not wanting to talk and wanting to be left alone.

More pupils in 1994 than in 1993 said that they had asked for advice when feeling stressed. Figure 31 illustrates this. This increase was common to both females and males although slightly more significant among males. In 1994, 16 more males and 12 more females, sought advice for stress than in 1993. Again the most frequently consulted people were family members: Mums, Dads, older siblings, Aunts and Grandparents; teachers were consulted less frequently and doctors consulted twice.

The respondents gave a similar list of their own coping strategies to the one compiled from the 1993 questionnaire (Chapter 4 Figure 18).

59% of respondents felt that the school should be doing more to help pupils who are suffering from stress, which is slightly more than in 1993, 33% said that this was unnecessary, slightly less than in 1993. However, the suggestions were almost identical the most common ones included: school counsellor, being listened to more, being given more time, give out advice booklets/leaflets, special classes and talks. 'Heartfelt' comments appeared in all year groups, the more poignant were:

'Teachers should be more approachable. I have read that at least two school kids die/commit suicide from stress from school each year. Teachers are too busy abiding by the rules - they should notice more.'

(Year 11).

FIGURE 31

	1993	1994
YEAR 7	8	11
YEAR 8	6	8
YEAR 9	7	16
YEAR 10	8	15
YEAR 11	12	18

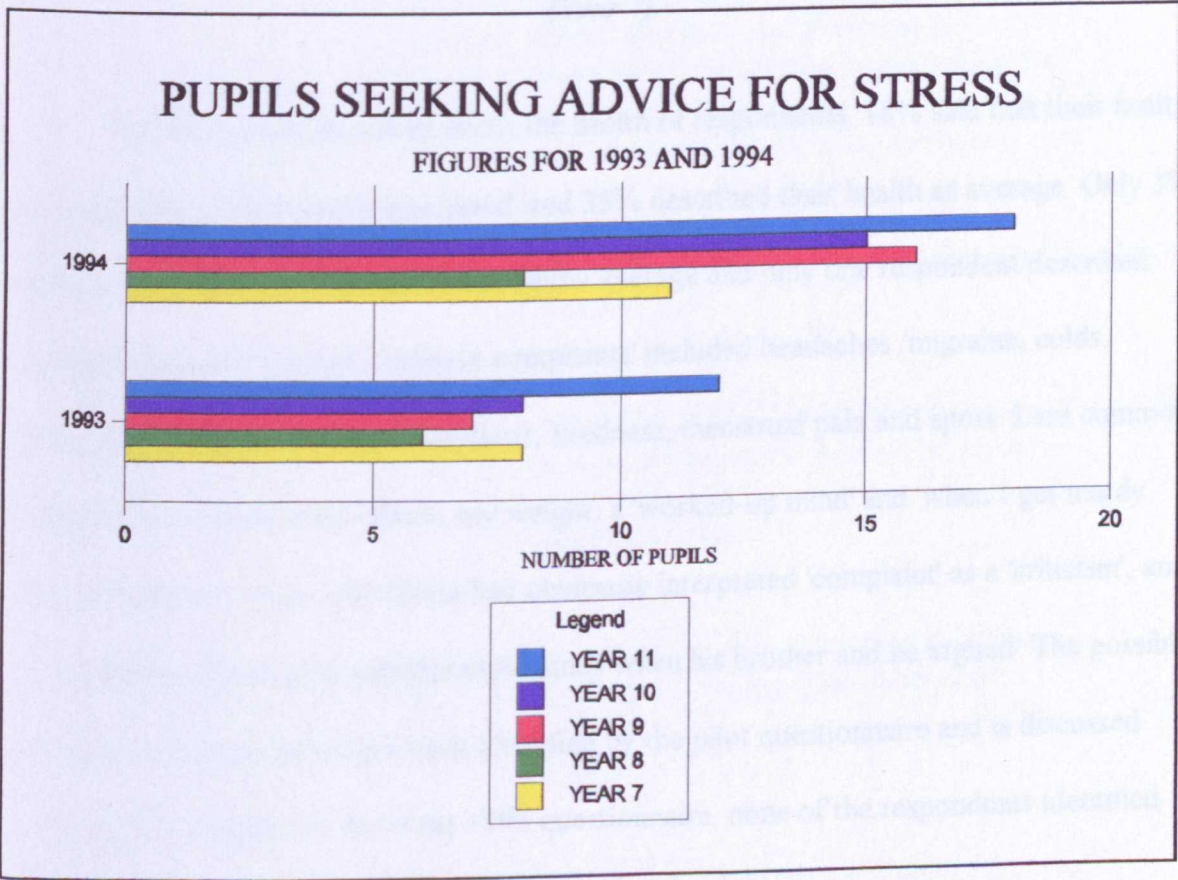


Figure 31

'Teachers should be more helpful - they sometimes make things worse'.

(Year 9).

'Create a 'problem room' - pupils can go and talk to someone there. Not teachers.'

(Year 8).

'Do something about bullying'.

(Year 7).

The final questions asked about the health of respondents. 18% said that their health was 'very good', 38% said it was 'good' and 35% described their health as average. Only 3% said that they felt that their health was below average and only one respondent described her health as poor. Typical 'common complaints' included headaches /migraine, colds, stomach ache, asthma, eczema, hayfever, tiredness, menstrual pain and spots. Less common complaints included tennis elbow, my weight, a 'worked-up mind' and 'when I get mardy with my brother!' (This respondent had obviously interpreted 'complaint' as a 'criticism', and was probably referring to parental reprimands when his brother and he argued. The possible ambiguity in this question had been identified by the pilot questionnaire and is discussed more fully in Chapter 3). As in the 1993 questionnaire, none of the respondents identified their feelings of 'stress' with ill health in this question.

Respondents self-reported good attendance records at school. 16% said that they were never absent; 33% said that they were only absent for one or two days each year; 24% said that they were absent for about one week each year. More frequent absences were not common: 16% said they were away from school for one or two days each term and 6% said one or two weeks each term. Only 3% said that they were absent more frequently than this.

The last page of the questionnaire was again left blank for respondents to record any further information they felt would be valid and relevant. Upper school pupils mainly chose to write something down in this space. Comments were generally supportive and positive but a few thought that the questionnaire had little relevance to them, and one respondent said it was hard to fill in. There were no blatantly derogatory comments. A selection of the comments from the last page of the questionnaire appears below:

'I believe the idea of teaching pupils about stress is a very good idea as the experience is not pleasant. Stress should be taught about round the time when almost all pupils go through it - their last two years of school when facing G.C.S.E's. However, they should learn to help themselves. This is the one big mistake I made at school. I believe my behaviour was caused by stress on regular occasions.'

(Female year 11. A pupil who was permanently excluded from the school before the end of her year 11).

'Stress doesn't seem to be associated with young people and they are not usually taken seriously. It's executives who get stress, not school girls / boys.'

(Female year 11).

'If there is anything worrying you, speak to someone straight away and don't keep it to yourself. If people don't know they can't help you!'

(Male year 7).

'Yes, some of the teachers don't realise we get stress and keep nagging at us.'

(Male year 9).

'I'm quite impressed that this questionnaire has been given out, so that we can share our experiences of stress with you.'

(Female year 9).

'I think that the questionnaire was very well presented to the pupils of this school! (And I hope you get good results from your findings!).'

(Anonymous year 10).

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE 1994 INTERVIEWS

The same volunteers were interviewed on the second occasion by myself on the school premises during the Summer Term of 1994. Two new interviewees from Year 7 joined the sample having volunteered to do so on the questionnaire, and two pupils who had since left the school agreed to come back to be interviewed.

The questions were again semi-structured and open ended to give the interviewees the maximum opportunity to talk about the issues relating to stress which were most pertinent to them. Answers were probed by me and developed by the interviewees as and when it seemed relevant. The interviews tended to be quite long and many of the interviewees had interesting stories to tell of their experiences of stress in school.

The basic questions which were asked of all the interviewees are as follows:

- ▶ After I had reminded the interviewee of how he or she described their stress level last year, I asked them to describe their stress level at the present time. Obvious differences were explored.
- ▶ Can you describe how this stress makes you feel?
- ▶ Is it always a negative feeling for you?
- ▶ Has it changed over the year? If so, how? (This question was omitted in some cases if it was already covered in the response to question one.)
- ▶ Is there anything in particular which is causing you stress this year but was not last year?

- ▶ Have you noticed any changes in the school over the last year? Have any of these changes been responsible for making you feel more stressed? (This question was included as the school became Grant Maintained in September 1993. There were changes that myself and other members of staff had noted and I was interested to find out if the pupils had made similar observations and had felt affected by them in any way. It turned out to not be a particularly productive question!)
- ▶ Have you noticed more of your friends feeling stressed? If so how? Is stress a word that you and your friends use a lot to describe how you feel?
- ▶ How do you feel now about the future? Have your plans changed since last year? What are your expectations for the future? Do you feel optimistic?
- ▶ Is there anything else you can tell me about stress in school? Anything that might be useful? Anything that you know about feeling stress in school that I don't?

Where pupils were being interviewed for the first time, the questions from the previous interview schedule were used (see chapter 5). The interviews all took place either in my teaching room, or in the Drama Studio where it was cooler and quieter on some days, either at lunch time or after school.

The two ex-pupils who returned to be interviewed, both went to a lot of trouble to come into school: re-scheduling a driving lesson and overcoming transport difficulties, which I felt showed a genuine commitment and interest in the research. Of the other ex-pupils who were contacted, one had emigrated to Australia with his family, one replied to my letter but was unable to come into school to be interviewed due to 'studies and other commitments'. However, in her letter she said, 'if you would still like to question me

further, I would be willing to answer another questionnaire as richly as I possibly could and post it back to you' (Sally), which she did! Some of her written contributions have been quoted in this chapter. One male wrote back and said that he did not want to take part in the research any longer and one female made an arrangement with me to interview her, but did not turn up!

The questions fall into three basic categories: those which explore current stress levels as perceived by the interviewees and how that stress feels for them; those which consider possible changes in the stress the interviewees have experienced over the last year (and any observations of stress among their peers) and possible reasons for this, and finally those which look to the future and attempt to explore the expectations of the interviewees. I have divided the interviewees into three groups: the College Group comprising ex-pupils: Upper School pupils comprising interviewees from years 10 and 11 and Lower School pupils comprising interviewees from years 7, 8 and 9.

Responses to questions from category 1- those which explore current stress levels and associated feelings

The College Group

For the two ex-pupils who came back to school to be interviewed, a fair amount of time was spent comparing school life with their current experiences of college life. Sally, the ex-pupil who filled in a second questionnaire instead of being interviewed, was also attending college at the time and many of her responses were comparative.

All three felt that their college lives were more stressful than when they were at school. The stressors were similar to those at school, mainly workload and time, but with the added burden of 'money problems' in two cases.

'They are a lot higher (stress levels). I feel stressed somewhere between occasionally and always. It's the pressure of work at college, homework and everything, it's hard. You have to do everything on your own, and cope on your own. Being at College I have to get my own money together, so I have money problems.'

(Lee).

The feelings associated with stress were the same as when they were at school. They described feelings of depression and negativity, tearfulness, irritability and anger. None of them said that the stress felt any different, rather the things which cause them to feel stress had changed but they did feel more able to cope with it than when they were at school. They seemed to have developed their own coping strategies which they had not been aware of, or used, when they were at school.

'I've found now I have gone into the Sixth Form, I get on with the people there really well - much better than at my secondary school which has made a lot of difference. There are always people there for you to talk to and socialize with (and moan to!) which relieves quite a lot of the stress.'

(Sally).

'If I am in the canteen at break I close my eyes and take a few deep breaths. I have been reading quite a lot of books on psychology and that helps. There is a special counselling group at college you can opt in to, but that doesn't appeal to me.'

(Lee).

The two interviewees both said that 'stress' was a common word for their peers to use at college, more so than when they were at school. They explained that it meant slightly different things to different people, but they all understood the feeling.

'Yes definitely, more is said than at school. At school you would not even mention the word stress or depressed but at college we sit around and say, 'oh I really feel bad and stressed out'. You can sit with your friends and talk about it and say what you did last night, moan about no money, no job. Everybody means slightly different things when they say they are stressed, but everybody understands it.'

(Joe).

They described their peers as 'suffering' from stress, looking 'drained', being 'more irritable' and 'tense', as being quite commonplace at their respective colleges, and mentioned smoking, drinking and taking drugs as a form of relaxation and stress relief.

'Smoking and drinking are much more prevalent in college. We go down to the pub across the road, it is a release from stress and to relax yourself. Drugs - it is not that common at college. I must admit there was quite a lot at school, but not that much in college.'

(Lee).

Sally described 'listening to music, talking to someone, walking, acting and singing' as her main methods of relieving her stress.

Both interviewees felt reasonably optimistic about the future although their long term plans had been modified. Lee admitted to occasional thoughts that he had perhaps not worked hard enough or had made the wrong decisions.

'Usually I feel optimistic about my future, but sometimes I think I have lost out here and I have had it. I don't feel like this often, it is just when I have had a bad day and the thought creeps in. If you want to get anywhere these days you've got to work at it. Sometimes I wish I had studied harder at school.'

(Lee).

Joe had experienced problems with his college course at first, as his GCSE results were not as good as he expected, and he had changed to something different. However, he was enjoying the student lifestyle and seemed content.

Upper School Interviewees

Almost without exception, interviewees from the Upper School said that they felt their levels of stress had increased since their last interview. This is supported by data from the 1994 questionnaire. In the questionnaire, 88% of Year 10 pupils and 90% of Year 11 pupils reported feeling stress at school. The main reasons given for this was increased workload, examinations, deadlines and what they were going to do when they left school; all similar curriculum generated stressors identified on the questionnaire. (In the questionnaire, curriculum generated stressors were mentioned 23 times by Year 10 pupils and 43 times by Year 11 pupils).

'Even more stressed because there is more pressure, a lot more work and the exams are coming up. I feel stressed most of the time.'

(Robert year 11).

'It has affected me more this year because there are more exams and stuff in Science, and English essays have to be longer. Generally the whole pressure put on you can cause stress. I feel stress. It is usually to do with school work, meeting deadlines and making sure it is good work. The pressure comes from teachers to do well. Sometimes I put pressure on myself.'

(Russell year 10).

Four pupils mentioned relationship difficulties, particularly, girls with their peers and boys with members of the teaching staff. These difficulties are also apparent from the questionnaire, where difficulties with relationships with teachers are mentioned 3 times by Year 10 pupils and 6 times by Year 11 pupils, and difficulties with peers are mentioned 14 times by Year 10 pupils and 17 times by Year 11 pupils.

For three of the female interviewees the relationship problems they discussed were the same as in the previous year's interview and the problems had still not yet been resolved. Although all the females said that the situation was not as intense this year as it had been the previous year, they still all felt stressed by it. In the questionnaire, 46% of respondents reported feeling stressed by their relationships with their peers, three quarters of whom were female. This could suggest that females experience more difficulties in their relationships with their peers generally, or that they are more willing to admit to them and discuss them.

The male who was most outspoken about teaching staff in the 1993 interviews (Andrew), felt equally strongly and was equally stressed this year:

'I feel angry that I don't have enough time, enough hours in the day to do things you want to do. I feel stress more often, more frequently but the feelings are just the same as last year. The teachers are getting on top of you more. They are always going, "Oh, these are your GCSE's" and all that, and if your work is a day overdue or something, they go mad.'

(Andrew year 11).

A few pupils mentioned this increased stress having a 'knock on effect' at home where they referred to 'feeling under pressure' rather than feeling 'stress'. They identified the pressure as coming from other people's expectations of them and not having enough time to pursue their own hobbies or leisure activities. However, difficulties with relationships at home is only mentioned on one occasion by a pupil in Year 10 in the questionnaire. A common sentiment is reflected below:

'We have got to try to live up to the expectations of the school. There is also pressure at home to do well in exams. My Dad doesn't particularly get involved, he just helps me if I need it, but my Mum keeps getting on at me to get the grades. I don't like it really. I am an only child and it makes me feel quite stressed carrying their hopes and expectations.'

(Lee year 11).

Lower School Interviewees

Lower School interviewees shared the opinion that their stress had increased since their last interview, although they perhaps expressed this in a less concerned and more accepting comments. Although the interviewees mentioned curriculum generated stressors frequently: homework, not understanding work or not being able to do work, SATS and 'options', as they did in the questionnaire, they also made more references to everyday life stressors and relationship problems as in the following comments:

'I still get stressed sometimes, depends what is happening. Today, I was playing football and my bag split and I lost my football boots. Just things like that, when I lose stuff. Other people annoy me, getting on my nerves and being stupid, that causes me stress. Teachers shouting at you, getting really tight work deadlines, hard work and being tired. I suppose having to come to school, that's stressful. I can really feel the difference when it is Sunday and I can relax.'

(Paul year 9).

'Quite often this year. It is worse than last year. Mainly my friends this year, there has been a lot of trouble. It does not let me concentrate as much as before. With options coming up it makes me think about what I'm going to do, that makes me feel stressful.'

(Louise year 9).

The 1994 questionnaire suggested that Year 8 pupils were feeling particularly vulnerable to stress and the prospect of SATS in year 9 was offered as a possible explanation for this. (There was an increase of 22% in Year 8 pupils who reported feeling stress at school in the 1994 questionnaire). These comments from a female interviewee in year 8 may add credence to this. Before this comment she had described herself as 'occasionally' feeling stressed at school and not 'feeling as bad as I did in the first year'. She went on to observe:

'People, like teachers, tell us, "you have to get ready for next year," "this is important for next year," "this is all going into your folder," "this is when you have to start thinking about it," "you can't just leave this year out." But nothing happens in year 8. We haven't just come to this school, so people think it's an easy year. It isn't, you still have to try really hard.'

(Sarah year 8).

I think that this remark is quite perceptive for a year 8 pupil; she has already understood one of the strategies many teachers employ to motivate their pupils: to play on

the importance of each year as a step towards the next and to make pupils believe that everything they do has some important implication for the future, which of course is not always the case. Sarah's perception of year 8 is that 'nothing really happens', and indeed in terms of academic significance many professionals would agree with her. (How many times are student teachers given Lower School classes to begin with in the interests of 'damage limitation', or parents told that if they must move out of the area and consequently change their child's school, do it before they are in year 9). Yet Sarah still feels under pressure from her teachers to do well. While there can be nothing wrong in wanting the best for pupils, or in encouraging them to achieve their potential, perhaps sometimes we as teachers are far too concerned with results (because of our own increased accountability) and are losing sight of the child. I think that is what the pupil in the 1994 questionnaire meant when he said that 'teachers are too busy abiding by the rules - they should notice more' (quoted in the previous chapter). Teachers are often just too busy and under so much pressure themselves that they do sometimes fail to notice some of the things which are happening in their classrooms.

An equally thought provoking comment came from a pupil in year 7 who had agreed to be interviewed for the first time. She had only been at the school for about nine months but she was obviously finding the transition from her previous junior school very difficult.

'Sometimes you feel you want to cry but you don't because you will get embarrassed. Sometimes people say things to you and they hurt your feelings but you don't like to show it. It didn't happen as much at junior school, but I feel more stressed at this school. I think it is stress. I tell my Mum sometimes, but I don't tell her everything I feel. Because I don't want to worry her. I feel rotten most days at school. I try to cry when I get home. In the morning I feel fine, but when I come home from school I end up crying again, most nights. Sometimes when I come home I go straight up to my bedroom. I try and lie down to try to take my mind off it. It helps sometimes.'

(Helen year 7).

For this pupil, stress comes not only from the transition to the school but also from her perceptions of the consequences of admitting her feelings to her mother. Helen believes that her mother will worry about her if she tells her how she is feeling. So added to her burden of unhappiness at school, is the belief that she is responsible for her mother's feelings and the desire to protect her mother from worry. Her feelings of stress are therefore compounded.

With two exceptions, all of these interviewees from the three groups described their stress as a negative and unpleasant feeling associating it with feeling sick, stomach upsets, headaches, tiredness, increased chance of an asthma attack, irritability, feeling depressed, anxious, miserable and lowered academic performance. All of these associations had been previously mentioned on the questionnaires and in previous interviews. The following quotation is an example of a typical response to the question exploring the interviewees' feelings about their stress:

'I feel tensed up and mentally ill. I seem to be more tired. I have the same amount of sleep but I feel more mentally tired this year. I think it is because you are doing more hours of work at night so in the morning you feel you can not be bothered to get up. I feel more tired and this makes me in a bad mood and stressed.'

(Katy year 11).

Two interviewees said that their stress occasionally motivated them to complete work or try harder, although they still described stress as a negative feeling.

Responses to questions from category 2 - any changes in the interviewees' experiences of stress and any reasons for this, observations of stress amongst their peers

The school became Grant Maintained in September 1993 and I wanted to find out if this had any noticeable effect on the pupils' perception of their stress. At first this did not seem to have been a particularly useful question as most of the pupils' comments referred to material changes in the school, new computers and furnishings for example. However, on closer examination it seems that some of the pupils feel that they are now being asked to work under a stricter regime and feel that some of their previous 'privileges' have been curtailed, and this may contribute to their feelings of stress, created by lack of 'environmental fit'. A feeling of being in conflict with their environment which was apparent in the previous year's interview but had now been exacerbated. These comments came mainly from Upper School interviewees, Lower School interviewees tended to comment on any changes they had noticed in a more constructive manner.

The College Group

These interviewees were not able to make significant responses to this question. They said it was 'nice' to come back and they liked seeing their former teachers. One interviewee remarked on 'a nicer atmosphere' but this might well be the case for any ex-pupil returning voluntarily to the school as a visitor. Obviously, they were unable to comment on any material changes.

Upper School Interviewees

Generally, Upper School pupils used this question to vent some of their frustrations with the school which were virtually the same as in the previous year's interview; complaints about the school dress code and rules which are too strict being the favourite.

'Lots of changes. School has become a lot stricter, there has been a clamp down on things like going out of school bounds - you get suspended. They aren't little things. They are serious in a way.'

(Robert year 11).

'I think they are getting too strict about the rules. Some of them are OK and acceptable. I think it's getting a bit pathetic, it's getting a bit too strict. I think we should be allowed to do more, like where we can go.'

(Emma year 10).

A possible explanation for the increased discipline came from an astute member of year 10 who said, 'pupils seem more aware, because it's been in the papers, and there's a lot more work'. Local papers take a keen interest in schools in the area; any adverse publicity at

this critical point in a school's history would obviously be unwelcome and could affect the school's future intake. There is sharp competition between secondary schools in the area.

One other interviewee in year 10 thought that one effect of becoming Grant Maintained was to cause more stress to parents as they would have to pay for more expensive school meals for their children and provide a school 'dress code' for them to wear, but she did not think this would cause increased stress to pupils. The dress code, as stated previously, had caused much ill feeling among pupils but the financial implications of a dress code had not been mentioned previously as being a source of stress among the pupils.

Lower School Interviewees

Lower School pupils either said they had not noticed anything different in particular, or made a reference to the school seemingly having more money in one interview, and less money in another.

The next questions explored the interviewees perceptions of stress in others and the use of the word 'stress' among their peers in general.

Upper School Interviewees

Nearly every interviewee said that 'stress' was a word used by their peers and that they could tell when their friends were feeling stress. Some acknowledgements were made to the ambiguity of the word, but it was generally felt that it was a word understood by all.

(In the 1994 questionnaire, 96% of respondents said that they had experienced stress at school at some time).

'We do talk about our feelings and we do use the word stress, which is what we actually feel. We use words like down and annoyed, which is not the same as being stressed. Stress causes depression. You could feel both.'

(Lee year 11).

'Yes, definitely everybody has found it harder this year. Stress is a word that is always used. I suppose it is one of those common words that teenagers always say. I suppose it can be said when it is not really needed. It is something everyone understands the meaning of, but it can sometimes be abused.'

(Katy year 10).

'A lot of people talk about work all the time. A girl in my year could not get to sleep because of the stress and the worry. She was doing so much at night she could not get to sleep because there was so much in her brain. It sometimes gets me down a bit. I can't see it changing, it will be even worse next year.'

(James year 10).

Where explanations were given, the causes of the stress were all either curriculum generated stressors (especially in Upper School interviewees) or relationship stressors, mainly among peers rather than teachers. This is in keeping with the results of the questionnaire. The effect of peer pressure was acknowledged and both its positive and negative aspects talked about.

'Sometimes I go round to my friends, but not all the time. Sometimes that can make you feel more stressed. They are going through the same things and start moaning about it and it makes you feel worse. It is not a comfort to know that people feel the same. Sometimes it's worse.'

(Lee year 11).

'I think everyone is feeling it at the moment. You can't really tell, but you can with some people. People don't always show that they are stressed, they keep it inside. It is always in the back of their mind. I think it is quite common for people to feel as miserable as I do. Having a laugh makes people feel better. Drinking too much sometimes, quite a lot of people are drinking, boys and girls. Smoking tobacco and other stuff, that's on the increase.'

(Robert year 11).

Lower School Interviewees

One year 7 interviewee had a distressing story to tell of his friend's experience of stress which illustrates the awful effects of stress for some pupils. The interviewee did say that he thought that his friend had learned something about himself and stress from this experience, and that it might not happen again as his friend now 'knew what to expect'.

'My friends start feeling stressed around tests and things we don't like doing. My best friend, he started, before the test to go really red and started to shake badly, and then he just went plain white and his lips went a purply colour. He was sick. He went home and came back and did his test and did alright on it. I think he was suffering from stress.'

(Ian year 7).

Peer pressure was a significant aspect of Louise's experiences of stress. She had experienced considerable conflict in her relationship with one particular group of friends. She is a very conscientious pupil with a desire to achieve. She also feels considerable

pressure from home, particularly from her mother who has high expectations of her. Louise had to make a conscious effort to change her friendship group to be with people who were more 'like minded' and supportive.

'Stress is something they talk about sometimes, mainly if they are getting left out. That's the main reason they get stressed over. Most of my friends aren't bothered as long as they have got friends and are popular, it's alright. They think, "it's only school, who needs it?" Some of them are interested, like the people I hang around with now. They know they have got to do well, and that's what I like about them. If you have got somebody to support you then you feel that you can do it. Not like if somebody has a negative attitude, you think you cannot do it.'

(Louise year 9).

Responses to questions in category 3 - future expectations

In the last few questions I again asked interviewees about their plans and expectations for the future. Many responses were very similar to the previous year with ambitions being quite modest but realistic. Many of the older pupils felt the uncertainty surrounding their examination results prevented them making any firm plans and they tended to express their ambitions in more cautious language for example; 'I would like' or 'I hope to'. Younger pupils were more positive and certain of their futures, 'I am going to' or 'I want to'.

Perhaps this indicates that these pupils have not, as yet, explored fully the requirements and qualifications needed to pursue their chosen career and have not had their confidence affected as a result. Or maybe as a year group they are more confident anyway than their predecessors. Perhaps this indicates that the effect of five years of education and

the constant reminder pupils have of the importance of academic success, results in feelings of self-doubt and lack of confidence in their prospects.

Upper School Interviewees

Most of the year 11 pupils said they either felt optimistic about the future or ambivalent. They all had plans which were dependent on examination results. They generally felt optimistic about the future and would be leaving the school with at least some happy memories.

'Scared a bit. It all depends on one day, exams and that. If you don't do well on that day, then your whole future changes.'

(Katherine year 11).

'I am scared of growing older, doing 'A' Levels and going to University. Sometimes I really can't wait to leave school, but at other times I really start panicking.'

(Kerry year 11).

'It depends what I get in my exams as to what I do next year. I will probably go to college and do a Geography course. I don't really worry about things. If it's going to happen it happens, that's it.'

(Andrew year 11).

'I don't feel very optimistic at the moment because of my results. If you don't get the results you don't get on the course. If I had to do retakes it would be like a year wasted when you could be doing other things. I will be happy when I leave the 5th. year but not school altogether. Some of the years I have enjoyed. It is just the pressure of school, going to college and being with people who are better than you.'

(Lee year 11).

All of the other interviewees had some idea of what they wanted to do in the future and replies referred mainly to careers, whereas last year more personal ambitions had been expressed, especially from the girls. This year, the girls seemed to have given more thought to their careers and had more concrete aims. Perhaps this indicates an increase in competitiveness among the girls, or at least the recognition that they can compete with the boys, or that they have to compete with them. The question had been couched in the same terms but had elicited an entirely different response, even from the year 7 pupils who were being interviewed for the first time. It seems, for all pupils, expectations had been raised. This could, indirectly be the result of the school's Grant Maintained status. Pupils seem to perceive being Grant Maintained as being 'different' and associate it with change, perhaps they also anticipate change in their own educational futures.

Lower School interviewees

'I know it sounds funny but I want to be a counsellor - something like this. My Mum tells me everything. I think when she is feeling down she talks to me. She said when I got knocked down, if I had died, she would have jumped off the motorway bridge.'

(Helen year 7).

This is the same pupil I quoted earlier in this chapter as feeling unable to confide her feelings of stress to her mother in case it made her worry. It seems from this further comment that the mother confides in her daughter to a considerable extent, yet is unable to allow the daughter to feel that she could do the same. Helen is under considerable pressure to act as 'counsellor' to her mother with no support extended to her in return.

The significance of examination results was mentioned by one interviewee who was positive about his choice of career, but had already taken on board the uncertainty about achieving it that so many Upper School interviewees had expressed.

'I want to be a chef but I think my GCSE's are going to worry me a bit'.

(Ian year 7).

My final question again gave interviewees the opportunity to tell me anything about school stress that they thought was important and I had not asked them. Nearly all of them wanted to say something either recounting a personal experience of stress or making a comment about the school which was not strictly speaking directly related to stress at school, and therefore I have omitted these comments from the research.

More pupils than previously referred to stress at home being responsible for some of the stress pupils experience at school. It was acknowledged that this was not directly related to school stress but it was felt that it exacerbated it.

'Maybe how other people can get you stressed if they are stressed, like your family. Other things besides school. Feeling stressed in school but not necessarily about things at school. I think quite a lot of people have family problems. They bring them into school and that causes arguments. I think it is more of a problem people feeling stressed at school because of things that have happened outside school, than what has happened inside school.'

(Sarah year 8).

'I get a lot of stress from the family. Mum and Dad having arguments and stuff like that. I think it is quite common children coming to school from unsettled homes and feeling stressed. School makes thing worse by putting more pressure on. I think family stress is much more common than being stressed by things at school. People whose parents have split up, you get stress from that.'

(Paul year 9).

Paul is the pupil who has experienced family problems throughout this research. He is the pupil whose Mum came to see me at Parents' Evening after my first interview with him.

It is interesting to note that problems at home do not feature significantly on the questionnaire data. This is also true of the previous year's findings. Pupils seem more willing to give this information in the spoken word rather than to write it down on the questionnaire. Perhaps because the information is so personal they feel more comfortable disclosing it on a 'one to one' basis rather than writing it down on paper. Or perhaps the personal and more 'intimate' nature of the interview situation gives them the confidence to express opinions they do not feel as confident in writing down.

Other final comments related to the way teachers treat pupils as being a cause of stress for some pupils. Emma mentioned on her questionnaire and interview in 1993, and again during this interview, that she felt 'clever' people were treated differently to other pupils and this for her was a cause of stress:

'I still feel that people are treated differently according to their ability. I think clever people still get more attention. I am not exactly clever, I am OK at some subjects, but some subjects I am a lot worse than other people. The less clever people should get more attention because they need more help. I feel neglected in certain lessons. This causes me stress because I am always thinking about it. Getting frustrated about it.'

(Emma year 11).

This feeling of being 'let down' by teachers was also shared with a pupil in year 7 who said:

'Some teachers are not very sympathetic or as understanding as they could be.'

(Helen year 7).

And finally an acknowledgement that stress can be a significant problem at school:

'I do think pupils suffer from stress and it is a real problem.'

(Andrew year 11).

SUMMARY

Again a general summary of the responses can be made and some conclusions drawn. Much of the information the interviewees gave me regarding their feelings when stressed and the school situations which cause them to feel stressed, compliment data from the previous interview and the questionnaires. The interviewees are very consistent in their perceptions of their stress and in their interpretation of it.

The vast majority of the interviewees felt that their stress had increased from the previous year. In some cases this was accepted and perceived as to be expected. Other pupils had expected some increase but not as much as they felt. The College Group also reported increased stress levels.

The feelings associated with stress remain the same but the stressors themselves have changed in a few cases. Stressors described are largely curriculum generated or to do with relationships with peers. Relationships with peers seem to stress females more than males, and in three cases the relationship problem was long term and had been discussed at length in the previous interview. Lower School pupils referred to curriculum generated stressors to a lesser extent than Upper School pupils, but made more references to every day life stressors and one year 7 pupil made a reference to bullying as a source of stress for her. The College Group added financial problems to their list of stressors.

Some pupils, who had been interviewed previously, referred to their ability to cope better with stress this year. The College Group also shared this belief. A year 7 pupil thought his friend would learn from a stressful experience and it probably would not happen again. This suggests that stress may have an 'experiential' dimension for some pupils.

All but two interviewees referred to their stress as being negative and unpleasant; the two who did not said that they had been motivated by their stress to either work harder or complete work, but that the experience had still been unpleasant.

The school's Grant Maintained status may have some bearing on the perceived stress of Upper School pupils, both male and female, who remarked on an increased application of school rules and felt that this might lead to conflict situations:

'The rules have got stricter. The smoking situation - a lot of teachers are coming into the toilets and that sort of thing to see if people are smoking. Getting expelled seems to be getting more common, for certain people. Certain people only have to go out of school for dinner and they are excluded. If you are told a rule and told to keep it, you are more likely to break it.'

(Lee year 11).

Ex-pupils from the College Group returning to the school for the interview remarked on 'a nicer atmosphere', as stated previously. Lower School interviewees commented mainly on the material changes to the school, or made vague comments about the school's financial situation which were unsupported and which did not seem to have a link with pupils and stress.

All interviewees felt comfortable with the word stress and felt it was a word that their peers also understood. However, an ex-pupil disagreed with this and said that it was not a word used in school but that it was used at college frequently.

All interviewees felt that they could tell when their peers experienced stress, one of the most significant factors being they looked tired and down, which supports the findings of the questionnaire data. Some pupils felt that their peers could support them when they were feeling stress, while others felt that this made their situation worse. Ex-pupils felt

supported by peers who felt the same as they did; one said that a stress counselling service was available to students at college but felt that he would not want to take advantage of it. A 'stress counsellor' was a popular suggestion on both questionnaires as being something the school could do to help pupils cope with stress.

Some interviewees felt more control over their stress than others, feeling that they could plan for it and therefore cope with it.

'I am more organised this year than last year, with deadlines and stuff, you have got to be. Being more organised is a way of managing stress.'

(James year 11).

'I expect to feel more stressed next year, with GCSE's coming up. I have seen my sister going through it and I'm not really looking forward to it. Sorting out my work targets and schedules will make it less stressful. I am disorganised, but if I try, I can be more organised.'

(Paul year 9).

The interviewees expressed similar ambitions and plans to the ones mentioned in the previous interview. Upper School pupils tended to sound less confident and expressed themselves more cautiously than in their previous interview. Lower School pupils sounded more confident. Nearly all interviewees made some reference to the importance of exam results to their plans and successes in the future. There were no comments relating to personal fulfilment being an important part of their ambitions as there had been in the previous interviews.

Some pupils felt that home stress had a significant bearing on the stress some pupils felt at school; this was given more attention in the interview than it had been given on the questionnaire.

Fewer comments were made about teachers and teachers' attitudes than in the previous year's interview, although feelings of being 'neglected' by teachers were expressed.

All pupils seemed to take the subject of stress seriously, feeling that it was a significant factor in school life. Although some were more philosophical believing stress is something which is just 'a fact of life'.

'I think everybody feels stress at some time. Whether it is at work or wherever. I would expect to feel stress at some point in my life.'

(Russell year 10).

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions to be drawn from these interviews are consistent with those drawn from the 1993 interviews. The following conclusions should be read in conjunction with those of 1993.

The questionnaire data identified a finite number of school stressors which I categorised as being either curriculum generated, a result of relationships with either family, teachers or peers, or every day life stressors. The interview data has refined these categories to some extent and identified sub-groups of school stressors, some of which are directly related to the initial categories and some of which are not.

These second order constructs of school stress include:

- ▶ Transitional stress created when moving to a new school or leaving school, going to work or into further education or moving into a new year group.
- ▶ The social construction of stress, closely linked to the relationship with peers category, but focusing more on the positive and negative effects of peer pressure, peer support systems and coping strategies.
- ▶ Stress caused by the school's behaviour policy, perceptions of authority and pupil status.
- ▶ Stress created by poor time management or a feeling of deprivation of leisure time.

- ▶ Stress resulting from perceptions of how other people will respond to knowing that someone is feeling stress, closely linked to perceptions of other people's expectations.
- ▶ And finally, stress created by the pupil's own expectations of his or her future.

Stress, as perceived by these interviewees is long term and on going. Pupils expect it to increase as they move up the school, and according to the questionnaire and interview data, it does. It also appears to be a continuing factor in Higher Education. Stressors generated from the curriculum seem to cause the most stress, and this increases as pupils move up the school. This is also supported by data from the questionnaires. (Figure 32).

PERCENTAGES OF PUPILS EXPERIENCING SCHOOL

STRESS IN EACH YEAR GROUP

FIGURE 32

YEAR GROUP	1993	1994
YEAR 7	63%	68%
YEAR 8	60%	82%
YEAR 9	81%	61%
YEAR 10	88%	88%
YEAR 11	93%	90%

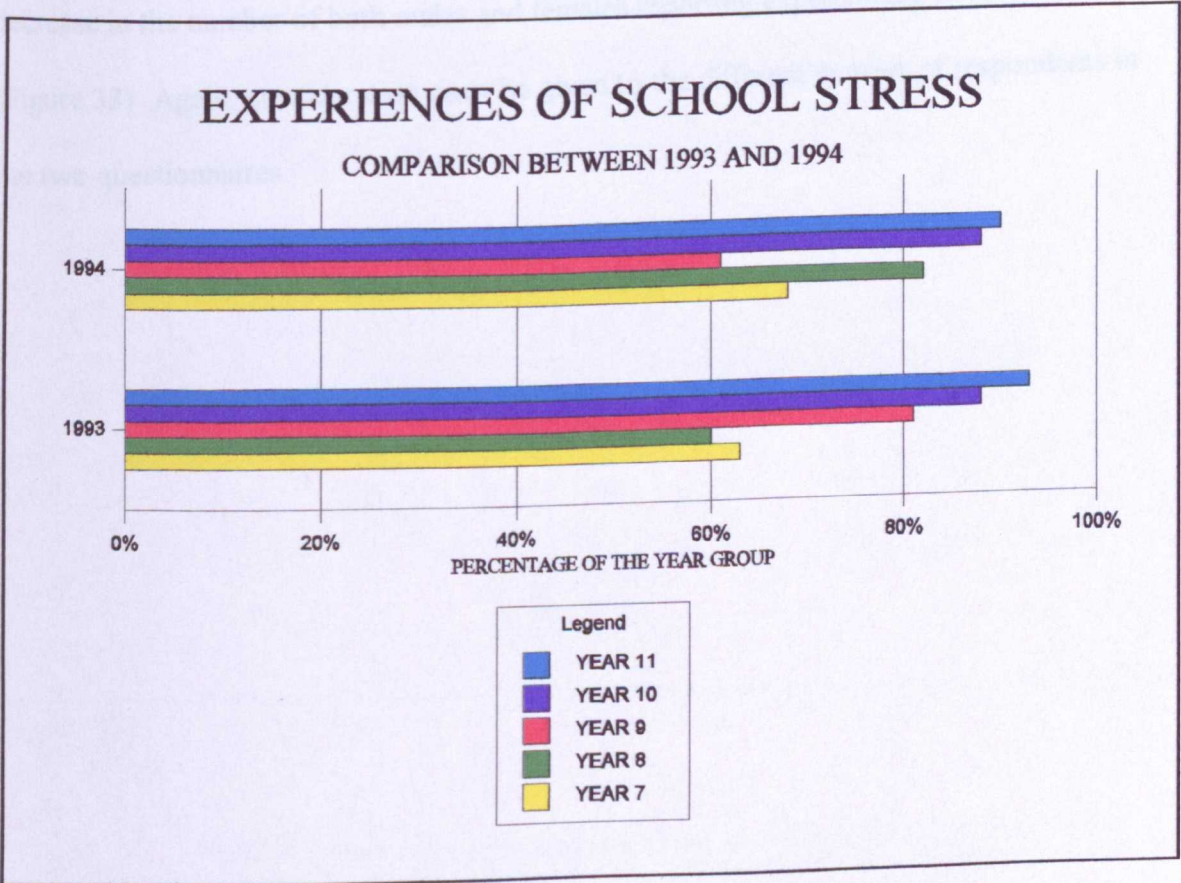


Figure 32

It is impossible to make an exact comparison of the data from the 1993 and 1994 questionnaires as there was a differing number of respondents to the questionnaire in each year: 167 in 1993 and 143 in 1994. The difference of 23 respondents is quite significant. It is interesting to note however, the Year Groups with the most significant differences in the number of respondents: Year 8 (35 in 1993 and 28 in 1994) and Year 10 (34 in 1993 and 24 in 1994) show the most and the least difference in the amount of stress reported by the pupils who did respond to the questionnaire. Year 8 shows a 22% increase despite 8 less respondents, and Year 10 stays the same despite 10 fewer respondents.

If we look at these figures in terms of male and female respondents there is a slight decrease in the number of both males and females reporting experiencing stress at school. (Figure 33) Again, consideration must be given to the different number of respondents in the two questionnaires.

NUMBER OF MALE AND FEMALE RESPONDENTS

REPORTING SCHOOL STRESS IN EACH YEAR

FIGURE 33

YEAR	RESPONDENTS	MALE	FEMALE
1993	167	55	70
1994	143	52	62

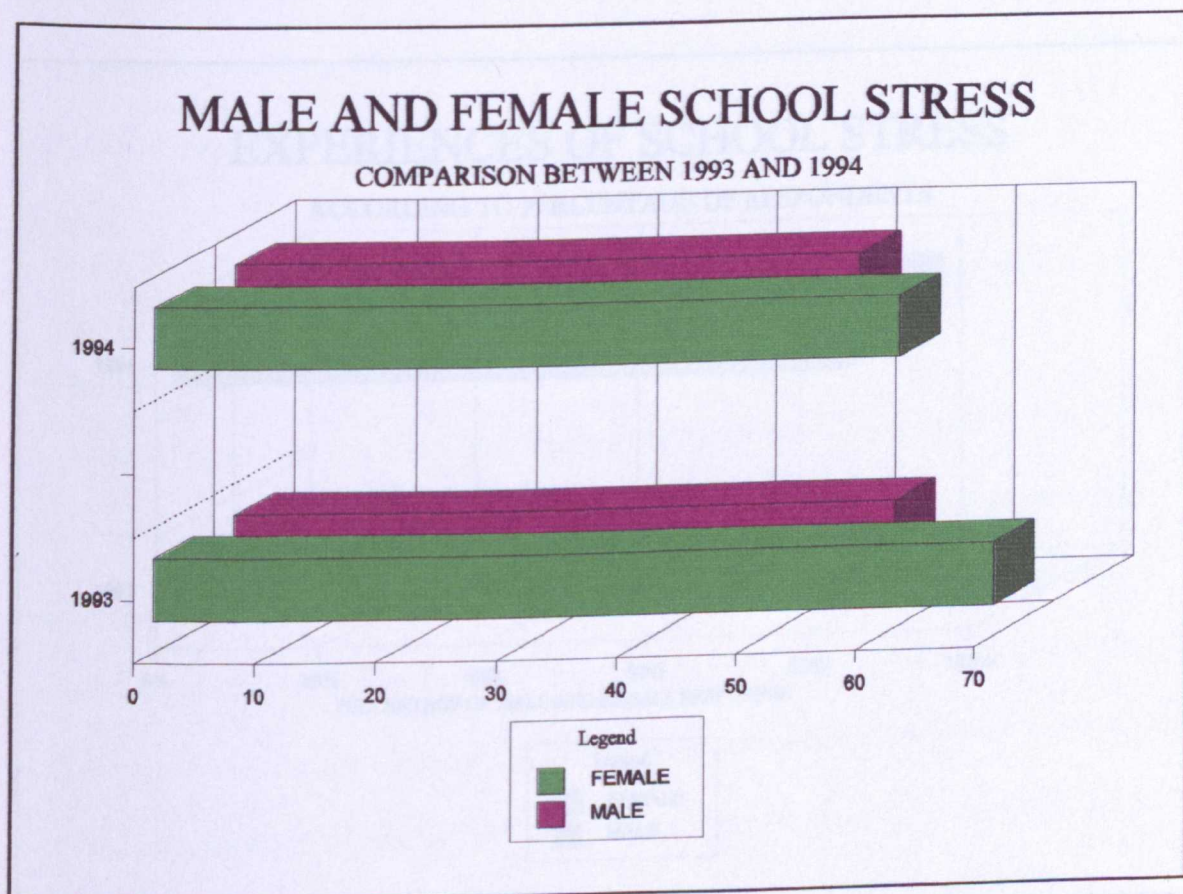


Figure 33

Females consistently report feeling more stress at school than males when the number of respondents each year are considered only. However, if these numbers are considered in terms of the percentage of male and female respondents reporting feeling school stress in each year, there is actually a rise in the percentage of males reporting

experiencing school stress, whereas the percentage of females reporting experiencing school stress remains consistent. (Figure 34)

FIGURE 34

YEAR	MALE	FEMALE
1993	69%	83%
1994	80%	82%

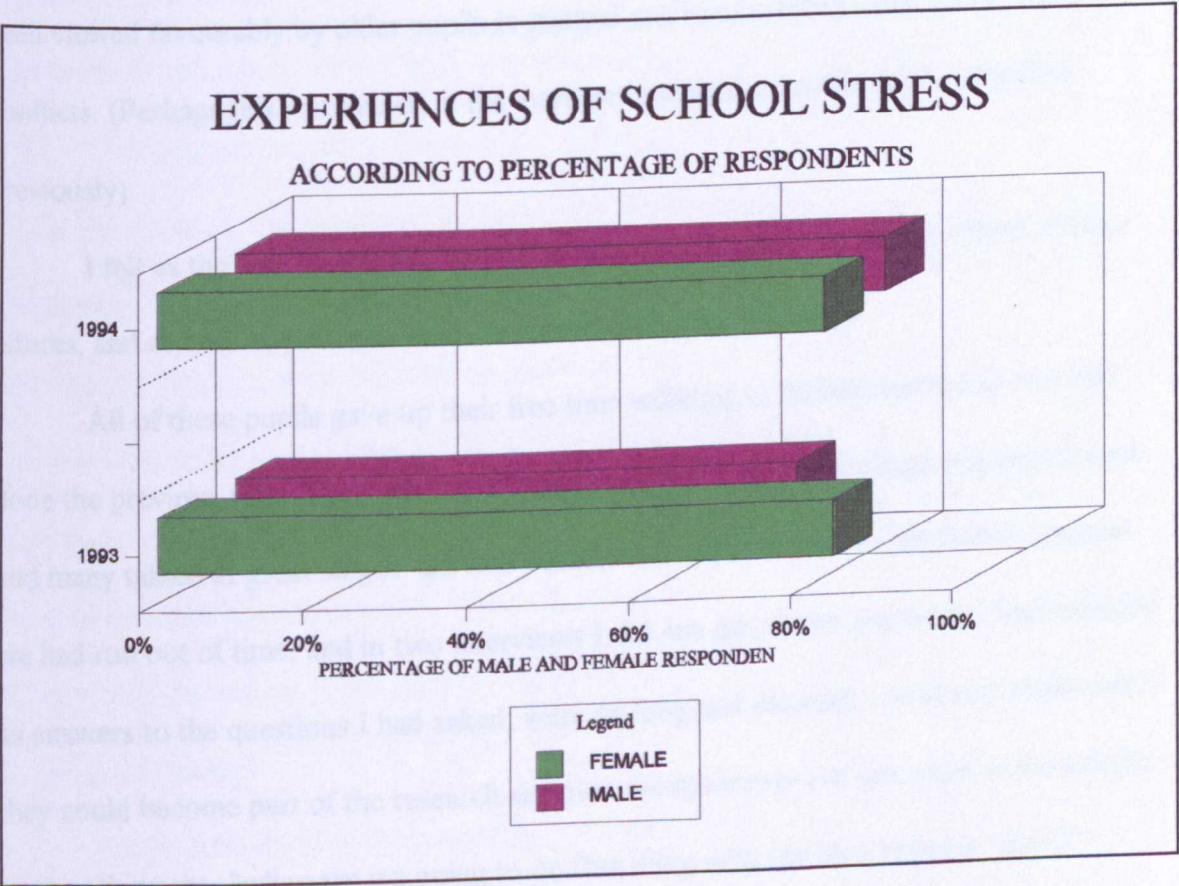


Figure 34

From these figures it would seem that female respondents to the questionnaire in 1993 reported feeling more school stress than their male counterparts, whereas in 1994

both males and females reported feeling almost equal amounts of stress and the males considerably more than they had reported previously.

There appears to be an element of 'experiential learning' from some stressful events for some pupils.

It is impossible to say for certain whether the school's Grant Maintained status has influenced pupils stress levels, but it can be said that pupils have perceived some changes in the school's discipline procedures and expectations of conduct. These changes have not been viewed favourably by older pupils in general and have created some 'environmental' conflicts. (Perhaps this is reflected in the increase in school stress for males identified previously).

I felt as the interviewer that the older interviewees sounded less confident of their futures, and as before, perhaps under-estimated their own potential.

All of these pupils gave up their free time willingly to be interviewed as they had done the previous year. They seemed to enjoy talking about their feelings and experiences and many talked at great length. On two occasions I had to terminate interviews because we had run out of time, and in two interviews I did not ask all the questions I had intended as answers to the questions I had asked, were so long and detailed. I have had pupils ask if they could become part of the research sample retrospectively and one pupil in the sample keeps asking me, "when are we going to do that thing with the tape recorder again?"

Clearly the pupils want to talk. Equally clearly there are strategies the school can adopt and changes it can make to alleviate the stress the pupils are feeling. I will now discuss my own views of the implications this research has on the practices and policies of the school.

CHAPTER EIGHT

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SCHOOL

Through talking with pupils and listening to what they have to say; by asking them questions and taking seriously their responses and after reading about pupils' experiences of school stress expressed in their own language, I feel that I have attained an accurate body of personal knowledge on which to make some suggestions on ways to improve the experience of schooling for our pupils, and to make life in school less stressful for them.

This research set out to discover the extent to which girls and boys experience stress in their school lives; stress created by the nature of their schooling. The research suggests that there are certain areas of this schooling which create stress for some pupils, and now moves on to propose some practical suggestions to help alleviate this stress. I have already discussed the subjectivity of the notion of stress and do not claim to be offering definitive answers to the problems it can create in the school environment. I am making suggestions which have come directly from my research, and in some instances, from the participants in the research themselves. Thus the research is not sterile; it has practical value and attempts to influence change.

As the school's Health Education Co-ordinator I am in a position to suggest change in areas affecting pupils' health. Some of my suggestions have already been implemented or are shortly to be implemented. In these cases I am able to offer some evaluation of their effectiveness, although this is likely to be tentative as none of the suggestions have been implemented for very long. These suggestions should be viewed as part of a 'rolling programme' of change. They will be monitored and evaluated according to the needs of the

pupils and the school. The sources of stress for pupils in school will not remain static and the suggestions offered here to help pupils may not always be appropriate; there will be a constant need to address the dynamic nature of school stressors and revise thinking on what may or may not be helpful. It is also impossible to view school stress in isolation from the many other factors in a pupil's life, which may be contributing to feeling stressed. However, my suggestions do primarily seek to address those issues over which the school does have influence and control.

My suggestions cover the following broad areas of schooling:

- ▶ The curriculum: its planning, organisation and content. This also includes the 'hidden' curriculum;
- ▶ Policy: writing and implementation;
- ▶ Self - help for pupils.

THE CURRICULUM

The curriculum generated stressors referred to in this research have all been identified from the perspective of the pupils involved in the research, and are not necessarily recognised by the school itself. No school would deliberately set out to create stress for its pupils through its curriculum. This emphasises the well documented 'gap' between intention and reality in discussion of the curriculum. Stenhouse writes of these differing views of the curriculum; one which equates curriculum with what is planned and intended and one which equates to what is actually experienced by pupils, and believes that 'our educational realities seldom conform to our educational intentions' (Stenhouse 1975). This certainly seems to be the case regarding the stress described in this research, reported to have been generated through the school's curriculum.

The most frequently mentioned curriculum generated stressors in all year groups were: tests and exams; coursework overload / underload, homework and meeting deadlines. Their mention increased through the year groups with Year 11 pupils understandably, feeling the most vulnerable. Pupils also reported feeling increasingly unhappy at school as they move through the year groups, directly related to the increasing amount of stress they feel.

A school can do nothing about nationally imposed testing at KS3 or GCSE examinations at KS4, but it can help pupils prepare for these and teach effective coping strategies. I have discussed this in the section on 'Self - help for Pupils'.

Coursework overload / underload and setting deadlines does appear to be a problem for pupils created by lack of co-ordination and consideration by staff. Many pupils reported

experiences of periods of time when no work was being set followed by too much work being set for the same deadline date. This does appear to be a genuine grievance rather than a result of poor time management by pupils.

The problems created by increased amounts of homework have been recently highlighted in the OFSTED report 'Homework in Primary and Secondary Schools' (1995).

The report found that pupils:

'Frequently worked much longer hours than was indicated in the homework timetable in order to meet coursework deadlines' and 'some worked at home for three hours each evening and for several hours at the weekend.'

(OFSTED 1995 page 14).

The report suggests that pupils are having to give up extra-curricular activities, sports and hobbies to meet the demands of homework, as this increased the working week by up to 20% in lower secondary classes and 50% in GCSE courses (TES 1995). Certainly homework and the time spent doing it was a very big issue relating to stress for the pupils who participated in my research.

Pupils and staff are issued with a homework timetable at the beginning of each academic year. Staff are asked to adhere to the timetable and not set homework on alternative nights for their own convenience or ease of marking. This does not always happen. According to comments made by the pupils in the school, colleagues' comments and my own experience the following situations arise:

- ▶ some staff change the homework night through negotiation with the pupils, which does not necessarily cause a problem;

- ▶ some staff 'forget' on the appropriate night and set homework retrospectively which can cause problems for pupils;
- ▶ some staff set extra homework in order to cover their syllabus or to make up for something in the syllabus they have forgotten to teach the pupils, this is a result of poor planning and always causes problems. The pupils who are most articulate and confident might protest but are met with the answer, "You need this for the exam" or are reprimanded for speaking out of turn. Either way they cannot win.

More careful monitoring of homework set by staff, by Heads of Faculty and Year Co-ordinators, would do much to alleviate this problem. A system of appeal for pupils who have a genuine homework grievance would also help the pupils to feel they have 'a voice' in the matter and may help them to feel that they have some degree of control over their school work. The school stress described by pupils in my research was closely linked to feelings of not being in a position to control situations, and being 'defeated' by school rules and authority. Perhaps a genuine system of appeal might make pupils feel more empowered and so help to relieve their stress and frustrations. Indeed, much of the emphasis of the school's pastoral curriculum leans towards lifeskills teaching, of which self-empowerment is a key concept. Perhaps here we have an opportunity to address not only stress management, as will be discussed later, but also negotiating rights and responsibilities within the school setting to give pupils the control they feel they are lacking.

Pupils will often share their grievances with their Form Tutor, but it is not always easy for them to help. Some newly qualified teachers would find it difficult to challenge an older, more experienced member of staff, or a member of staff with more status, about

setting homework on the wrong night. Indeed experienced staff might well think twice before mentioning a seemingly small matter such as this to a colleague of higher status. However, it is important to empathise with our pupils and understand that issues which might seem quite minor to us, can be very significant in their perceptions.

A system to help pupils organise their homework which is used in my own Faculty is to 'publish' the week's homework on notice boards outside teaching rooms, either in advance or on the day it should be set, along with the date it should be handed in. Pupils use these to jog memories usually, but a few of the more conscientious use it to plan their work for the week.

Heads of Faculty have a responsibility to monitor the work of their Faculty members and should encourage good practice in planning and preparation of work; they should insist each Faculty member is fully convergent with the needs of the syllabus being followed so that there is no last minute 'cramming' before important exams. Pupils have the right to expect and trust their teacher's integrity and should not be manipulated because of poor management of an examination syllabus.

It would also seem logical for Heads of Faculty to liaise with one another at the beginning of each academic year regarding important coursework / examination dates, to avoid 'overloading' pupils at certain times and 'underloading' them at others. Pupils need to have a timetable or planner published to them at the beginning of the year containing all these important dates so that they can plan the year accordingly. The school's Examinations Co-ordinator also needs to be involved to advise Heads of Faculty of when key examination and assessment dates occur to avoid clashes with coursework deadlines.

This system has apparently been tried at the school, but according to the perceptions of the pupils it has not worked. Perhaps it has not been monitored carefully enough or

adhered to strictly enough by members of staff. To work effectively it has to be applied rigorously. It is no good publishing crucial dates to pupils so that they have an awareness of what is to come and can plan and prepare for it, if the timetable does not match up with the reality of what happens at the school. This is likely to make matters worse for pupils and increase their stress, rather than reducing it. To work the system needs to be seen by staff as a serious commitment to pupils to help them organise their time and reduce their stress, and it needs to be monitored regularly. As I said earlier regarding homework, pupils need a means of appeal if they feel that the system is not working for them. All appeals need to be treated seriously and not perceived by staff as pupils simply 'moaning' about too much work.

There have been some additions to the school's pastoral curriculum in the last year, suggested by myself as a direct result of this research, which have been attempts to address the problem of stress in school.

Lessons in time management have always featured in the curriculum in all year groups, and have had some success. Usually these lessons aim to raise pupils' awareness of how they actually spend their time and help them to see ways of managing their time more effectively through planning, target setting and evaluating their progress.

From September 1995 the school is placing more emphasis on personal organisation as well as time management. A considerable amount of money has been invested to provide every pupil with a 'personal organiser'. This takes the form of an A4 ring binder with loose sheets of paper containing essential information for each year group for example, in Year 7: timetables (daily and homework), names of subject teachers, what to do if you are lost, what to do if you are ill and the correct equipment to bring to school; Year 11's personal organiser contains information such as: timetables (daily and homework), contact names for

Sixth Forms and Colleges in the area; dates of when to apply and space to make notes and to keep a record of possible items for their National Record of Achievement.

It is hoped that the personal organiser (which replaces a homework diary which all pupils had previously) will help pupils in the day to day running of their school life. It is also seen as a means of communicating with home as there are forms in every year group's folder for messages from school to home, and vice versa.

Two more curriculum initiatives which I have been more directly involved in are the implementation of a lesson on stress management in the upper school pastoral curriculum and the organisation of the school's first Health and Fitness Day. Both of these initiatives were a direct result of this research.

The lesson on stress management was delivered by a colleague to all Year 10 groups during the Spring Term of 1995. The lesson was planned by my colleague and myself but due to commitments elsewhere on the timetable I could not be part of its delivery.

As we had only one lesson, of approximately fifty minutes in length, we were very limited in what we could achieve in the time available. As stated previously, much of the school's pastoral curriculum is based on lifeskills teaching. Health education is delivered from the perspective of providing pupils with the information and skills needed to empower them to make informed and effective personal choices regarding their health. With this in mind it was decided that the aims of the lesson should be:

- ▶ to raise awareness of stress as having both physical and psychological manifestations; positive as well as negative effects;

- ▶ to give pupils the opportunity to discuss and share with others some of the events and experiences in their lives which cause them to feel stress, and to understand that what is stressful for one individual is not necessarily stressful for another;
- ▶ to suggest some strategies and techniques which might help to reduce their stress; to give them time to practice these skills in a safe and non - judgemental environment.

Each form was divided into five groups and given a set of cards. Each card contained a 'symptom' of stress: headache, dry mouth, tiredness, feeling irritable, wanting to cry for no obvious reason for example. There were twenty two cards all together. Each group had to decide what might be the cause of the symptoms on the cards. Stress was not suggested to them before they saw the cards, (the pupils had not been told the lesson was about stress management either), but all groups identified stress as being the most probable cause of most of the symptoms.

The groups were then asked to come up with their own definitions of stress and brain storm the things in their lives they found stressful. Although these pupils were not being asked specifically about things in school they found stressful, nearly every group mentioned a selection of the stressors relating to school that had been identified in my questionnaire and interview data. The following table shows the stressors which were mentioned by the pupils more than once. I have collected the data from all the groups taking part in the lessons over the six week period. This would be approximately 168 pupils, assuming all were present at school on the day of the lesson. (Working in groups of five or six).

***STRESSORS MENTIONED BY PUPILS MORE THAN ONCE
IN THE STRESS MANAGEMENT LESSON 1995.***

EXAMS	30
PARENTS/FAMILY ARGUMENTS	30
HOMEWORK	23
MONEY (DEBT)	23
FRIENDS	22
SCHOOL	16
BOYFRIENDS/GIRLFRIENDS	15
JOBS/CAREERS/FUTURE	15
COURSEWORK/DEADLINES	12
TEACHERS	12
BULLYING	11
BROTHERS/SISTERS	10
SEXUAL PROBLEMS	9
VIOLENCE/DEATH	9
ILLNESS	8
APPEARANCE/WEIGHT	7
AGE	6
DIVORCE	6
COMPETITIVE SPORT	4
CLOTHES	3
LIFE	3
ABUSE	2
SCIENCE	2
SPOTS	2

Many other 'one off' stressors were mentioned but not included in the table, for example: not being able to do things, practically everything, alcohol, drugs, smoking and the lottery!

When these stressors are grouped according to the categories I used in my analysis of the questionnaire data, there are some interesting shifts in the assumed importance of each category for these pupils. However, the category relating to curriculum generated stressors still outweighs the other four categories. This is shown in the following pie chart and table.

FIGURE 35

Relationships with peers	48
Relationships with teachers	12
Relationships with family members	48
Curriculum generated stressors	102
Every day life stressors	70

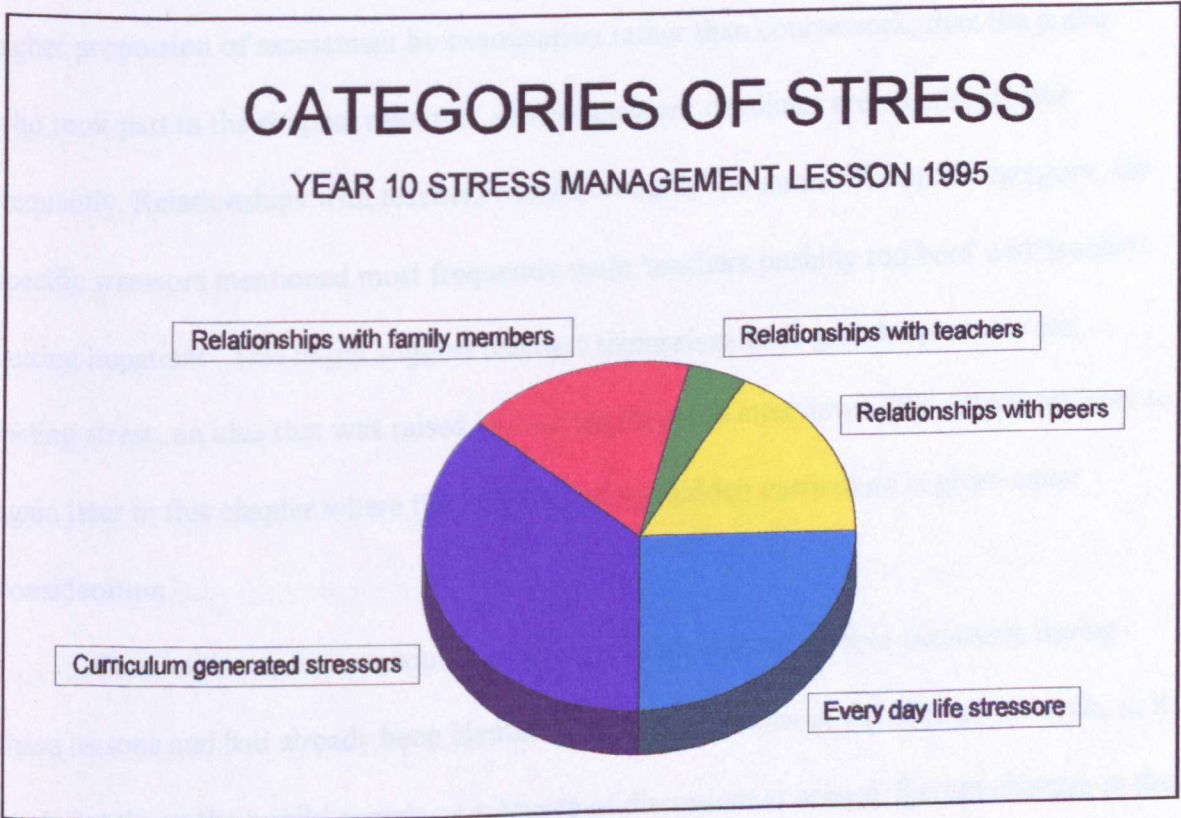


Figure 35

As the pupils were asked to brainstorm any stressors in their lives it is not surprising that the every day life category should be much larger than it appeared in the research data. It is important also to remember that the pupils would have been working in groups in close proximity to one another and would be influenced by what they could hear their peers saying in other groups, this probably accounts for a lot of the repetition in this category. More stressors connected to parents, family life and sibling relationships emerged in this

lesson than in the research, but again this is understandable as the research asked for specific school stressors. What is remarkably consistent with the research data, is the frequency curriculum generated stressors are mentioned despite the increase in the other categories. It seems then that for these pupils issues relating to schooling still cause them the most stress in their lives.

Exams feature more frequently for these pupils as most of their subjects have a higher proportion of assessment by examination rather than coursework, than the pupils who took part in the original research, and coursework deadlines are mentioned less frequently. Relationships with teachers remains roughly the same. Within this category, the specific stressors mentioned most frequently were 'teachers pushing too hard' and 'teachers getting impatient'. This might suggest teachers themselves feeling under pressure and feeling stress, an idea that was raised by two pupils in the interviews. This idea is referred to again later in this chapter where the influence of the hidden curriculum is given some consideration.

Competitive sport as a source of stress was mentioned on four occasions during these lessons and had already been identified on two occasions in the original research, so it is obviously on the pupils' agenda as a source of discontent at school. Recent changes in the National Curriculum require schools to deliver a revised P.E. curriculum from September 1995 with an enhanced role for team games. All schools are now required to offer two hours per week of P.E. and sport in formal lessons and are also expected to provide a range of sporting opportunities at lunch times, in the evenings and at the weekends. OFSTED will inspect the quality and range of games offered as part of the P.E. curriculum and report on this, and on the provision the school provides outside its formal curriculum. A survey is also to be conducted by OFSTED into the state of school sport and to identify good practice.

The implications of this might well be to increase the level of stress experienced by some pupils at school during these longer periods of P.E. Team games and the increased emphasis on competitiveness will also increase the stress some pupils feel during these lessons. Pupils may also feel under increased pressure to participate in sporting activities outside the formal curriculum and to take part in Sports' Day (previously identified as a source of stress for some pupils). Indeed, P.E. teachers themselves are likely to feel greater pressure in trying to deliver the revised curriculum, which may be very difficult in some schools, with the added burden of OFSTED's apparent interest.

The colleague delivering the lesson then discussed some of the effects of stress and encouraged the pupils to think of both positive and negative effects of stress. Again, in keeping with the research data, pupils had great difficulty in identifying any positive effects of stress. Each group had to then rate the original cards containing the symptoms of stress according to their perceived degree of seriousness.

The pupils were then asked to brainstorm any coping strategies they knew about or that they used themselves. Typical brainstorms revealed a similar list of strategies to those compiled from the questionnaire data. The following table catalogues each coping strategy which was mentioned on more than one occasion, together with the number of times it was actually mentioned.

STRATEGIES FOR COPING MENTIONED BY PUPILS MORE THAN ONCE IN THE STRESS MANAGEMENT LESSON 1995.

TALKING TO SOMEONE	26
DOCTOR/COUNSELLOR/HELPLINE	18
DRINK	13
SHOUT/HIT/SCREAM	13
SLEEP/REST	9
ORGANISE YOURSELF	9
SUICIDE	8
SMOKE	8
DRUGS/PILLS	8
RELAXATION	8
HOLIDAYS	8
EXERCISE	8
EAT	6
MEDITATE	6
LISTEN TO LOUD MUSIC	6
SEX	5
CRY	4
GO FOR A WALK	4
WATCH TV	2

Again, there was a range of 'one off' strategies mentioned by these pupils, for example: 'have a laugh', 'bottle it up', 'quit' and 'have a bath'.

There are six new strategies not previously suggested by the pupils taking part in the original research, the most worrying of which is 'suicide'. (Suicide had been mentioned twice previously). Helplines in general were mentioned more often, particularly Childline

and The Samaritans. All of these pupils attended a lesson delivered by The Samaritans in Year 9 as part of their lower school pastoral curriculum, so the acknowledgement of the organisation as a possible source of help when completing this piece of work may be explained by that. However, it is still quite saddening for them to think of suicide as a coping strategy. During a recent publicity campaign aimed at young people, The Samaritans state the suicide rate among the young (under 16) has increased 34% in the last ten years. They cite examination pressure and examination results as significant contributory factors, though not exclusive ones, to the distress a suicidal individual would be feeling. (The Samaritans 1995).

Equally worrying is the more frequent mention of alcohol, drugs and tobacco in this lesson than in the original research. Sex, as a coping strategy, also appears for the first time among this group of pupils. It could be argued that these coping strategies are more representative than the ones identified by the original research as they have been suggested by members of a complete year group rather than a small, random sample. If that is the case some worrying trends might be seen to be emerging: greater reliance on potentially harmful coping strategies. This may be reflected in society at large and not just within the school community, as the following surveys suggest.

A recent Health Education Authority survey showed that approximately 12% of 11 to 15 years olds were regular drinkers, with 5% of girls exceeding the 'sensible adult drinking limit' of 14 units a week. The same survey suggested 12% of 11 to 15 year olds also smoke and a quarter of boys and a fifth of girls in Britain have had sexual intercourse by the age of 16. (Health Education Authority 1992). In his book 'Forbidden Drugs', Philip Robson suggests about half of UK teenagers experiment with a 'street drug' by the age of 16 (Robson 1995).

According to Graham and Hughes, about 5 in 100 teenagers are seriously depressed, while twice that number show significant distress. They suggest that about six in every 100,000 boys aged 15 to 19, and one to two percent per 100,000 girls, commit suicide each year. Before puberty, boys and girls suffer depression to a roughly equal degree but by the age of 15 or 16, the rate is twice as high for girls as for boys (Illman 1995).

A study by Rutter and Smith (1995) suggests a 'dramatic rise' in psychosocial disorders such as depression, suicide, alcoholism and criminality since the second world war among children and teenagers across the western world. Possible causes for this include raised expectations by education, adolescents feeling isolated and increased family disharmony. The authors of the report suggest 'we have major problems' and urges the Government to give higher priority to research into the effects of youth policy (TES 1995; Rutter and Smith 1995).

Conversely, it is quite positive that so many of these pupils identified talking and seeking advice as being the more common strategies for coping with their stress. It also suggests that these pupils have more awareness of how they can control their stress which, as I have stated previously, is indicative of its management and therefore constructive.

There is some evidence here that the time management lessons have had some effect, with nine references to becoming 'more organised'. There were also a few one off suggestions relating to time management, for example: 'make time for yourself', 'study but leave time to socialise' and 'plan your time'. Again, these comments show awareness and control.

At the end of the lesson pupils were shown some relaxation techniques and visualisation exercises which unfortunately, were met with some degree of frivolity. The

pupils found this quite hard to take seriously in a classroom, and on some occasions my colleague had to abandon this part of the lesson because the pupils 'were too giggly'.

The lesson was evaluated by the teacher delivering it and by the pupils involved who felt it had been generally worthwhile. Pupils especially liked the opportunity to talk about the things which they find stressful and agreed that it was helpful to share their experiences with others. From the pupils' notes I have been given from the lesson, these experiences are remarkably consistent with those mentioned in the research data. (I had previously asked for permission from the pupils to see these notes, no one had declined it). The colleague delivering the lesson felt that some modifications were needed for the last part of the lesson plan; perhaps a larger area to work in so that pupils could actually lie on mats on the floor to complete the relaxation exercises, or even finding an 'outside provider' to show the pupils the relaxation techniques. These ideas have been taken on board and will be referred to again later.

This lesson, or a modified version of it, will remain on the pastoral curriculum in the future and will again be delivered by the same member of staff. At the moment I am also looking to introduce a similar lesson to the lower school pastoral curriculum. The lesson delivered by The Samaritans, which indirectly deals with pupils' stress, has been on the pastoral curriculum for the last three years and will remain for the foreseeable future. (The contact with the organisation was initiated by myself at the beginning of this research).

There is scope to adopt a cross-curricular approach to stress management, although this is still at a formative stage at the school. The idea is for a co-ordinated approach, rather like health education itself, where various Faculties address the issue of stress and its management through their curricula. This is already done on an 'ad hoc' basis in the school. Some Faculties can, and already do, make clear contributions: for example science

addresses the biological aspects of stress and P.E. addresses stress management through exercise and relaxation. Less overt contributions may come from English through discussion and study of appropriate literature texts, (there are many excellent books for young people which address many of the 'problems' they may experience, notable authors include Judy Blume, Anna Fine and Robert Swindells) or through humanities, where pupils may learn about alternative lifestyles, the advantages and disadvantages of living in a different culture and coping strategies employed, for example meditation or yoga.

The last, and most recent, curriculum initiative came about through a personal desire to promote health issues in the school as well as a means of implementing change arising from my research.

As part of my role as the school's Health Education Co-ordinator, I chair a cross-curricular committee of seven members which meets approximately once every half term. At the end of the academic year in 1994 I suggested to my committee that we organise a day, for all pupils, of activities and workshops all relating to the theme of health and fitness. The committee agreed to the idea, a date was fixed with the head teacher (July 1995) and the planning began. We each took responsibility for organising activities for pupils and sent a standard letter out to anyone who we thought might be prepared to help us, free of charge!

Through this research, I had identified a need in the school. A need to recognise that some of our pupils have very bad experiences of stress in school, and that nearly all of them have some unpleasant experiences of stress in school. The Health and Fitness Day was an opportunity for me to bring outside 'expertise' into the school to help meet this need.

I had much support from The Health Promotion Unit in Derby and I was able to find advisory teachers and facilitators who would be prepared to come to school on the day

to deliver workshops on stress management, assertiveness and relaxation. I decided to timetable these workshops in Year 10 for the reason that they would not have the opportunity again in school to participate in them, whereas if I decided to repeat the day in the future younger pupils would have another chance. In fact the workshops would have been suitable and beneficial in any year. At a later stage in the planning, because of extra help, I was able to offer Year 8 a relaxation class as well.

The Health and Fitness Day was considered highly successful by both staff and pupils. I evaluated the day with some Year 10 pupils who spoke very favourably about most of the activities they had participated in, the favourite activity being the relaxation class. After my colleague's experience of trying to involve pupils in Year 10 in relaxation exercises as part of her stress management lesson I had wondered how this workshop would be received. However, it seems that the advisory teacher who delivered the session was able to involve the pupils in a way that a more familiar member of staff would never be able to do. The pupils were also in the drama studio, which is much bigger than a classroom, and they were all able to lie on the floor comfortably. They were also unaccompanied, (the day was organised on a form basis, and each form was accompanied by their tutor), at the request of the person delivering the lesson which also helped to release inhibitions.

The relaxation class with Year 8 was not quite so popular and some of the younger pupils found the idea difficult to cope with; the facilitator for this activity was a school nurse who was used to dealing with children in that age group. She said that some of the pupils were a little giggly and lost their concentration, however, the teaching staff who joined in the activity said it was excellent! The plan for this lesson is detailed below and is taken from 'The Unemployment and Health Resource Pack 1992'.

Managing Stress

Action

Learn a simple relaxation technique:

- ▶ First - find a chair with a good back support, it doesn't have to be an easy chair.
- ▶ Try to make sure that you will not be disturbed for at least **5 minutes**.
- ▶ Sit upright and well back in your chair, so that your thighs and back are supported.
- ▶ Rest your hands on the tops of your thighs, or cradle them (palms up) in your lap.
- ▶ Rest your feet on the ground just beneath your knees.

Now choose somebody to read out the following instructions slowly and softly.

Instructions:

- ▶ Close your eyes. **Don't feel embarrassed**, if you are doing this with a group.
- ▶ Begin by breathing out first. Then breathe easy. Now breathe out slowly like a balloon slowly deflating. Do this once more, **very slowly**, then go back to your ordinary breathing, nice and quiet and steady.
- ▶ Now direct your thoughts to each part of your body in turn.
- ▶ Think first about your **left foot**. Pull your toes up towards your knees - let go, feel the tension go. Do the same with your right foot.
- ▶ Your feet are now resting easily on the floor.
- ▶ Think about your **legs**. Let your thighs roll outwards.
- ▶ Let your **stomach** muscles become soft and relaxed. You don't need to hold them in at the moment. Let your tummy rise and fall as you breathe quietly and easily.

- ▶ Think about the **fingers on your left hand**. They are curved, limp and still - now the **fingers on your right hand** - they are starting to feel warm and soft.
- ▶ This warm and soft feeling is spreading right up to your shoulders - let them drop, then let them drop even further. (When you are tense, they bunch up).
- ▶ Let your mind go back to your feet, legs, hands, shoulders, tummy, neck and feel them warm easy and soft.
- ▶ Let your **face** relax. Make sure your eyes are not clenched up tight. Let your bottom jaw sag, and your teeth are apart. Your lips are soft and not touching - feel the lines on your forehead disappear.

Now, instead of thinking about yourself in parts, become aware of the overall sensation of **letting go** - of peace and quiet. You are now relaxed and rested.

Stay like this, listening to your breathing, slowly rising, easy - think of something which makes you feel at **peace**.

If you find yourself becoming tense, just go back and check out that all the parts of your body are relaxing.

Carry on with this for about five minutes. Then when the time is up, wriggle your hands and legs a little. Open eyes, sit quietly for a minute, then get up slowly.

The above exercise **really does help**. You have to experience it several times to realise that even five minutes is an effective way of calming you down. Practising this relaxation response technique not only helps us to cope with stress, it can prevent aches and pains which come from muscle tension. It can help us avoid unnecessary tiredness, and **very importantly for all of us**, it can improve relationships with others because it is easier to get along with people when we are relaxed and at ease with ourselves.

I am hoping to establish the Health and Fitness Day as an annual event at the school and next year will be looking for more providers who would be willing to present stress management activities and other related workshops, to all year groups.

THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM

The term 'hidden curriculum' is generally acknowledged to have been used first by Phillip Jackson in 1968 in his book 'Life in the Classroom'. In this book, Jackson argues that children must learn to understand what is transmitted through the 'rules, routines and regularities' of the school day in order to survive and 'have a satisfactory passage through the school institution' (Lynch 1989). These features, identified by the 'keywords: crowds, praise and power' form the core of Jackson's hidden curriculum. These features, according to Jackson, are 'unofficial' and 'learning' to cope with them is in addition to other learning experiences in school, which are referred to as the 'manifest' or 'official' curriculum. In simple terms the hidden curriculum is defined then as being all the things pupils learn in school which are not part of the school's intended curriculum but which are inescapably part of the school's 'way of life'. Stress seems to be part of this way of life, not only for the pupils who participated in this research, but also for some of the staff, according to the observations of these pupils.

My research suggests that some of the staff at the school are perceived as being under stress by some of the pupils. Comments from interviewees relating to teachers' 'attitudes' suggest that some staff are giving out negative messages to pupils, albeit unwittingly, via the hidden curriculum. One interviewee described some teachers as 'angry people' and other interviewees described feeling 'let down' by teachers. As a practising teacher, I often feel pressured by time and many of my colleagues would agree that finding quality time for pupils, outside lesson time, has become increasingly difficult. It is at just such times that pupils are likely to look to their teachers for support. One other interviewee

suggested that her teachers were 'too busy' to notice her or help her. Certainly through the hidden curriculum teachers constantly give out the message that they are always in a hurry, and pupils have to learn to wait and be patient now more than ever before. Mills recognises this problem:

'When children are with teachers on a regular basis, in a relaxed atmosphere without time pressures, teachers are able to give the time and effort to helping them. The relationship between teachers and pupil is crucial and must not become destroyed in the maelstrom of educational initiatives.'

(Mills 1992 page 121).

It is understandable that teachers are feeling more stress now with increased work load and accountability. Teacher stress is now a nationally recognised and reported condition. In June 1995, 'The Times' reported the number of applications from teachers for early retirement had doubled since 1994 and the new stress helpline set up by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers had been 'inundated' by calls. At least one of the early callers to the helpline was said to have attempted suicide. ATL statistics are less dramatic; they claim that their 'innovative Stress Helpline' had dealt with 'nearly 200 members' providing 'counselling, plus advice and information on ways to combat stress' (ATL October 1995).

Leicestershire Education Authority have recognised the problem of stress in teachers and also amongst the families of pupils. Six Leicestershire schools, four primaries and two secondaries, are taking part in a 'school stress counselling pilot'. The aim is to provide 24 hour advice on how to reduce stress to teachers and families:

'A new organisation called the Leicestershire Schools Staff Counselling Service, who will be overseeing the trial period of the scheme, which is being run along with the occupational health programme provided by Leicester Royal Infirmary.

If the project is successful, after the 12 - month pilot period, it will be extended to any school in the county. There are three categories of help available. The first is a telephone helpline, the second is four hours of face to face counselling. A third level offers up to eight hours of direct counselling.'

('Times Educational Supplement' October 1995).

A discussion of teacher stress is beyond the scope of this thesis but there does seem to be a relationship between teacher stress and pupil stress, which might well be a fruitful area for future research. Certainly some of the pupils in my research feel that their stress is aggravated by teachers also feeling stress.

I have considered introducing relaxation classes and stress management classes for staff and will be pursuing the idea in the future. Stress management has been on the agenda on previous staff development days, perhaps this is an area which staff would benefit from revisiting. However, with so many other important educational initiatives needing addressing on staff development days and the impending visit by OFSTED to the school, it is unlikely to be addressed in the coming academic year.

In Chapter 5 I discussed the role of the hidden curriculum in maintaining stereotypes in schools and how this can limit potential and curb aspirations. The hidden curriculum may well play a part in perpetuating feelings of stress amongst pupils. For example the inherent emphasis on competing and winning in P.E. lessons and associated activities; GCSE syllabi in English which insist that pupils should 'perform' to an audience as part of their compulsory oral component; due to lack of space in some schools, the way pupils are often squashed into unsuitably small areas during inclement weather and at end of term assemblies; the constant emphasis on the need to 'do well' and 'to succeed' in academic

terms and the almost unavoidable way schools mirror cultural stereotypes, for example regarding: ideal male and female roles, attitudes to wealth, weight, physical appearance and dress. All of which, according to the pupils taking part in this research, can compound the feelings of stress already created purely by the school environment and the nature of schooling itself. Indeed it may well be that we totally underestimate the influence of the hidden curriculum; it is thought that because learning via the hidden curriculum is unconscious and consistent, it is learned better and is more powerful than the school's 'official curriculum'.

However, views on the outcomes of the hidden curriculum vary considerably. Some curriculum theorists may not recognise it at all while others make 'varied and sweeping' claims for its significance (Gordon 1982).

Jackson suggested in 'Life in the Classroom' (1968) that learning within the hidden curriculum detracts from 'official learning'. He suggests that the 'social and institutional requirements of schooling' are 'anathema in many ways to educational goals' and that 'conformity, not creativity brings reward' (Lynch 1989). Other more radical views cite the hidden curriculum as a 'device for social control' (Vallance 1974), maintaining the 'present class structure of a capitalist society' (Gordon 1982).

The work of Hargreaves (1978) and Bowles and Gintis (1976) has made a significant contribution to the literature on the hidden curriculum and its importance to educational outcome. Much of this literature highlights the hidden curriculum's negative educational outcomes, its alienating effects on pupils and its contribution to maintaining social inequalities. The last twenty years has seen an increase in discussion and research in the role of the school in the 'reproduction of inequalities' (Lynch 1989). Key issues are class, racial and / or gender inequalities. The hidden curriculum, it is claimed, has made a

significant contribution to perpetuating inequality in schools; among claims for the hidden curriculum are that it teaches children to be passive, that conflict is unimportant, helping others is less important than getting on oneself, competition is more important than co-operation, and that 'girls are inferior to boys' (Gordon 1982) or that 'men are more important than women' (Meighan 1986).

Possible future research into the hidden curriculum and stress might reveal a relationship in some of the areas I have already mentioned, among others: competition, oral and academic performance, environment, attitudes and stereotyping. The significance of these areas of the hidden curriculum and their effect on pupil stress has become apparent in this investigation into pupil stress, but unfortunately their further exploration was beyond the scope of this research. It seems highly likely to be a fertile area for future examination.

POLICY WRITING AND IMPLEMENTATION

There seems to me to be three main areas of school policy, or lack of school policy, which have a significant effect on the stress pupils feel at school. These areas are:

- ▶ A Stress Policy - as yet unwritten;
- ▶ An Anti - Bullying Policy - currently being written and inherent in the school's Ethos Document, Code of Conduct and Equal Opportunities Policy;
- ▶ Open Access Policy - written and implemented.

STRESS POLICY

The school has a Health Policy which was written, and is regularly updated, by myself. The policy was first written in 1993 when I was appointed to the post of Health Education Co-ordinator at the school and when this research began. Since writing the original document I have made many additions in the form of 'policy statements' which serve as appendices to the full Health Policy. Policy statements cover whole school issues, for example: caring for pupils with asthma, the school as a no smoking premises and responding to incidents of substance misuse.

As a result of this research I feel that the school also needs to make a policy statement addressing pupil stress. The school needs to acknowledge that the problem exists

for its pupils; we should not now be asking the question 'do pupils feel stress or not at school?' but rather 'to what extent do the pupils feel stress at school and what can we do to help them?'. The policy needs to be proactive as Sandra Mills states:

'Many difficulties in coping with stress in adult life, and indeed some sources of stress in adult life, may be traced back to pressures experienced in childhood and adolescence and the subsequent development of inappropriate coping strategies and behaviour patterns. The school, therefore, can play a major part in helping pupils under stress and in developing skills which will enable them to cope with it.'

(Mills 1992 page 1).

I will be suggesting to the school management and staff that a policy statement regarding stress is included when the policy is again amended. A suggestion for this policy statement is offered below:

SUGGESTED OUTLINE

This school acknowledges that most pupils, at some time during their school life, experience stress as a direct result of their schooling. This stress can vary immensely in its intensity and duration. For most individuals it is an unpleasant experience which can be both disquieting and debilitating. It can damage physical and psychological health and prevent pupils from achieving their true potential. Too much stress can contribute to harmful effects on an individual's long term health and affect his / her sense of well-being.

Some of our pupils may be feeling stressed from sources other than the school, for example their home environment or from within themselves. If this is the case, they are likely to display their symptoms in school and their attitude and attainment is likely to be

affected. Observant teachers are likely to notice this and are in a position to help, however, liaison with Form Tutors and Year Co-ordinators is essential.

To combat the stress pupils experience in this school, we ask staff to follow these guidelines, most of which are common sense and followed as a matter of course anyway:

- ▶ Be aware of the content of the school's Ethos Document, Equal Opportunities Policy, Code of Conduct and Anti - Bullying Policy, and be prepared to correct any behaviours which contravene any of these documents.
- ▶ Be observant and share with colleagues any concerns you may have about any pupils.
- ▶ Adhere to the published homework timetable and dates on the coursework planner.
- ▶ If it is necessary to reprimand or punish a pupil, make sure that she / he is clear of what the punishment is for. Explain the negation of school rules if this is necessary.
- ▶ Do not put pupils in a position of potential embarrassment, for example, forcing them to read aloud in front of the class or to run in a race on Sports' Day.
- ▶ Be positive and supportive in encouragement and praise, but do not promote unrealistic expectations from pupils or parents.

- ▶ If a pupil clearly needs to talk and you do not have the time to give him / her at that moment, suggest someone who might be free to help or make an alternative arrangement with the pupil. Do not just send them away.

This suggested outline for a stress policy statement will be discussed at the next meeting of the Health Education Committee and will be amended according to any suggestions from the members of that committee. It will then be taken by committee members to Faculty meetings for further comments and amendments will again be made. After this it will go to senior management and a full staff meeting for discussion, before the Governing Body give final approval.

ANTI - BULLYING POLICY

Bullying was cited a significant number of times in the 1993 questionnaire data and an increasing number of times in the 1994 questionnaire data (for a comparison see chapter 6) as a source of stress for pupils. The school has already recognised the problem of bullying and has already begun writing a policy to address it, as many schools have done in the last five years. An increase in media and public interest has kept bullying in school high on the education agenda. One interested group, the Commission on Children and Violence set up by the Gulbenkian Foundation, has gone as far as to suggest that 'all institutions involving children should be legally required to have anti-bullying policies' (The Times Educational Supplement 1995).

If we are able to reduce the instances of bullying in the school, there is likely to be the automatic 'knock on' effect of reducing some pupils' stress levels. However, it is not clear from the research data how much of the bullying actually occurs in school and it might well be that we are unable to address the complete problem. To my knowledge there have been occasions of bullying where the school has been unable to intervene and parents and pupils have been advised to consult the police.

Although a detailed discussion of bullying is beyond the scope of this thesis I would like to quote the results of some research into bullying which has been conducted at the school by a colleague as part of her Master of Education dissertation. (Her research was originally referred to in Chapter 6). Her results suggest that the school has a higher than average percentage of pupils who identify themselves as being bullied, compared to national statistics.

'My own results have shown our problems to be different to those found nationally, in terms of scale, but very similar in most other respects except one. The percentage of pupils who identified themselves as being bullied sometimes ranged from 30 - 62%. The range within that who identified being bullied one or more times per week was 14 - 35% with a further range of 7 - 20% who described themselves as being at the receiving end of bullying type behaviour but did not describe themselves as victims. Those reporting behaving as bullies ranged from 6 - 24%, with the number who acknowledged themselves to be doing it one or more times per week ranging from less than 1 - 10%. There was further range of 4 - 14% who admit to behaving in a bullying manner but do not identify themselves as bullies. In comparison with national studies that have been done this does not look good.'

(Grooms 1994 page 55).

	<i>Bullied sometimes</i>	<i>Bullied more than 1 x week</i>	<i>Bully sometimes</i>	<i>Bully more than 1 x week</i>
<i>Whitney and Smith</i>	10%	4%	6%	1%
<i>Ahmed and Smith</i>	18%	7%	10%	3%
<i>Yates and Smith</i>	22%	10%	12%	4%
<i>Personal sample</i>	45%	24%	14%	6%

*(Whitney and Smith 1991; Ahmed and Smith 1991; Yates and Smith 1989
in Grooms 1994 page 55).*

As these statistics seem so high, it is surprising that bullying did not appear more frequently as a source of stress in my research. Although there was some increase in the number of times bullying was cited as a stressor over the two years of my research, it is not as significant a stressor as the above statistics might suggest. Perhaps the pupils associate feelings other than stress with being bullied, fear or anxiety for example, and do not perceive bullying as a notable source of school stress when asked to identify all sources of school stress for them. Whereas in the research quoted above, pupils were asked about their experiences of bullying in school only, and no other potentially unpleasant school experiences.

The school's Anti - Bullying Policy is currently in draft form and quite a long way from implementation at the time of writing but there is considerable commitment to it from

staff and the work of my colleague referred to earlier has done much to keep bullying firmly on the school's agenda and to maintain impetus. As she states:

'A school needs a definite statement about its attitude to bullying. It needs to be very obvious and clear. All members of the community need to know what their position is with respect to bullying behaviour. It cannot be set apart from the culture of the school, which reflects the values, aims, attitudes and procedures of the school. Some of these can be 'legislated for' in terms of school's decisions, some cannot. An anti - bullying policy or statement can contribute significantly towards the positive school ethos and simultaneously a positive school ethos will contribute significantly to ensuring that an anti - bullying policy works.'

(Grooms 1994 page 58).

And will, hopefully, do much to relieve the stress our pupils experience in the school.

The draft Anti - Bullying Policy is detailed below and needs to be read in conjunction with the school's Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct was reviewed at the beginning of the Autumn Term 1995. All pupils were given the opportunity to contribute to its writing by discussing its proposed content with their Form Tutors and writing down their own suggestions for inclusion. It is hoped that the completed document takes on board pupils' own ideas as well as those of the staff, and will therefore give them ownership of its content. Each pupil has been issued with their own copy of the Code of Conduct and there are copies in every room in the school. The Code of Conduct is also detailed on the following page.

Draft Anti - Bullying Policy

Working Definition:

A pupil is being bullied when another pupil, or group of pupils, say nasty things to him or her. It is also bullying when a pupil is hit, kicked, threatened, locked inside a room, sent nasty notes, when no one ever talks to them and other things like that.

However, if two pupils of equal power or strength have an occupational fight or quarrel, this is not bullying.

Responses:

We always respond!

There are three levels of response:

Level One 'Challenge'

To be used by all colleagues:

To ascertain the seriousness of the incident:

- ▶ Ask what is happening.
- ▶ Decide if it is aggressive behaviour, 'casual' bullying and/or 'systematic' bullying.

Refer to Year Co-ordinator if necessary.

- ▶ This behaviour is not acceptable.
- ▶ Punish if appropriate.
- ▶ Report on a blue or green slip. (Colour coded to distinguish incidents which happen during lesson time from those which occur during break or lunch times.)

Level Two 'Response'

- ▶ Always managed by the Year Co-ordinator of the victim.

- ▶ Year Co-ordinator decides which staff will work with the individuals.
- ▶ Pika's Method to be used.

Level Three 'Resolution'

- ▶ Always managed by the Year Co-ordinator of the victim.
- ▶ Year Co-ordinator decides which staff will work with the individuals.
- ▶ The process followed uses a 'no blame' approach, requires significant counselling skills and should involve support/training processes for bullies and victims.

This proposed policy was revised in October 1995 when the following document was issued to staff for comments.

Anti Bullying Policy

Draft 11 October '95

Definition of bullying:

Bullying is repeated behaviour which makes other people feel uncomfortable or threatened whether this is intended or not.

There are different sorts of bullying, but the three main types are:

Physical - hitting, kicking, taking or hiding belongings including money,

Verbal - name calling, teasing, insulting, writing unkind notes,

Emotional - being unfriendly, excluding, tormenting, spreading rumours, looks.

People react differently. It is not always possible to tell if someone is hurt or upset.

Aims:

We aim to make our school a caring community where all pupils are able to learn in a safe and happy environment. We strive to encourage an atmosphere of equality, co-operation and care.

Encouragement to tell:

It is important that we create an atmosphere in the school where students who are being bullied, or others who know about it, feel that they will be listened to and believed, and that action will be swift but sensitive to their concerns.

Not telling protects the bully or bullies, and gives the message that they can continue, perhaps bullying others too.

Procedures:

In the first instance, it is important to make it clear to the victim that revenge is not appropriate, and to bullies that their behaviour is unacceptable, and has caused distress.

Every effort is made to resolve the problem through counselling of both parties.

At this stage, parents of both parties are informed of what has happened, and how it has been dealt with. It is vital that everything that happens is carefully recorded in a clear factual way.

If the bullying behaviour continues, and counselling has not worked, then sanctions follow.

It is important that counselling is maintained for both parties, even when the sanctions have been applied.

To students:

If you are being bullied, or you know someone who is, please tell us straight away, and it will be dealt with. Not telling means that the victim will continue to suffer and the bully will carry on, probably with others too. If you tell us we will always respond. We all have a responsibility to make sure that bullying is not allowed in our school.

To parents:

If you think your daughter/son may be being bullied, or they tell you that they are, please let us know straight away. Please reassure them that we will deal with it sensitively but firmly. If your child tells us they are being bullied, or we discover they are bullying others, we will contact you, and will discuss together how the situation can be improved.

To teachers:

If you think that bullying is happening, talk to the students concerned and ask them what has been happening. Either ask them to write it down, or do so yourself, so that it can be passed on to the Tutor or Head of Year.

We need to be particularly vigilant at breaks, lunchtimes and travelling times, around the corridors between lessons and in the area of the playground and toilets. These are times and places where victims are more vulnerable, and bullying is not easily seen.

Curriculum work can enhance this policy in two ways:

1. By dealing with the topic of bullying, in a way which explores why it happens and gives alternative ways of behaving, and dealing with difficulties.
2. By using teaching methods which encourage co-operative work and a variety of groupings so that students extend their relationships beyond a small group of friends.
3. By supporting positive behaviour.

Code of Conduct

Every student, from Year Seven to Year Eleven has responsibilities to the school community. Students have rights which the school will try to uphold.

The Responsibilities of the Students

Students should:

- ▶ expect to be responsible for their actions
- ▶ be polite at all times and treat other students, staff and visitors with consideration and respect
- ▶ not bully or attempt to bully others by word or action
- ▶ work to the best of their ability and allow others to work without interference
- ▶ carry out teachers' requests at all times, and not disrupt the lesson in any way
- ▶ attend school regularly and on time
- ▶ come to school properly equipped for work
- ▶ not interfere with the property of other pupils
- ▶ play their part in creating an attractive school environment. Avoiding litter, graffiti, damage to school property and premises will help ensure this
- ▶ take responsibility for their own learning

The Rights of Students

All the students have the right:

- ▶ to learn without the interference of others
- ▶ to feel secure and free from humiliation, physical or verbal threat or abuse
- ▶ to be treated fairly and with respect by students, teachers and other adults in the school
- ▶ to be listened to by other students and teachers
- ▶ to be taught in a well-ordered environment and be given help by teachers
- ▶ to have their achievements and merits recognised

The Bottom Line

We will not tolerate:

- ▶ truancy
- ▶ drinking alcohol
- ▶ physical violence
- ▶ damage to property
- ▶ theft
- ▶ threatening behaviour
- ▶ sexist and racist behaviour
- ▶ smoking
- ▶ gambling
- ▶ drugs in school

OPEN ACCESS POLICY

A few pupils referred to lack of space as being a source of stress in the 1993 questionnaire; more pupils referred to unwittingly breaking rules regarding the areas of the school and grounds they are allowed to go in to at break and lunch times as being stressful, especially when they fell foul of lunch time supervisors and transgressions were punished.

Since completing the research the school has adopted an 'open access' policy at break times and lunch times. This allows pupils to go almost anywhere on the school premises or grounds they wish to go, any 'no go' areas are kept locked. This may help those pupils who previously found the restrictions imposed upon them difficult to negotiate and reduced their levels of stress. However it has increased problems in some areas.

With pupils allowed to be anywhere they choose in the grounds or in the buildings, it is virtually impossible to supervise pupils' safety and conduct. It is thought that this may have led to increased incidents of bullying and inappropriate behaviour, although there is no official evidence of this. This could certainly make some pupils feel more vulnerable and increase the levels of stress they feel at lunch times. Indeed, there are pockets of children who stay in supervised classrooms all lunch time, every lunch time, because their lives are made miserable by other pupils if they go out into the yard or on the field. However, these are pupils who have always adopted this strategy, even before the open access policy was implemented.

Some areas of the school were seen to impose considerable health and safety risks to unsupervised pupils and so with hindsight were declared 'no go' areas. This has certainly

added to the anxieties and concerns of under - staffed lunch time supervisors who I'm sure would certainly say that their stress levels have increased due to the open access policy.

The policy is likely to be reviewed during the next academic year.

SELF HELP FOR PUPILS

It has been shown that many of the pupils recognise the value of talking as a way of combatting their stress and many would be prepared to consult professional help if they thought it was necessary.

The research data shows an increase in the numbers of pupils seeking advice for stress between 1993 and 1994. The increase was noted in all year groups and among males and females alike (Chapter 6). When pupils were asked how they thought the school could help them with their stress, the most frequent response was to have a 'school counsellor' or 'someone to talk to' who was not a teacher. The pupils questioned would seem to want this facility not only to help them manage their stress, but also for a host of other difficulties they feel they cannot discuss with a teacher, or perhaps more appropriately, do not want to discuss with their teachers. Difficulties in relationships with teachers do not feature significantly in the research as being a source of stress for pupils, (other than the comments regarding the hidden curriculum), so it is reasonable to assume that the relationships between most teachers and pupils in the school are good. Maybe pupils do not wish to disclose their difficulties to teachers because they fear it will destroy their relationships, or they feel embarrassed or they feel that a teacher would automatically 'do something about it' which is not always what the pupils want. Pupils are also aware that a teacher cannot offer them confidentiality.

With these factors in mind, I approached our Senior School Nurse who is based at the Health Promotion Unit in Derby. The school nurses are anxious to liaise more closely with schools and want to be more involved in visiting their schools and providing them with

a service where possible. The school nurses attached to my school have developed an initiative which provides interested schools with a counselling service on a 'drop in' basis.

Drop in sessions can be a regular feature of the school week, or be held less frequently if desired. The school provides a quiet room for the sessions to be held in, somewhere preferably where pupils attending will not be too conspicuous, and the school nurse staffs it. Through prior 'advertising' pupils are aware of the counselling sessions and can turn up between given times and consult with the nurse. An appointment system can be used if it becomes necessary.

The school nurses can offer confidentiality and can also give advice on sexual health, (sexual difficulties are mentioned as being a source of stress for some pupils), which teachers cannot. However, if a pupil discloses something to the nurse which affects his/her health and safety then it might be necessary for the nurse to inform the school. An incident of abuse might be an example of this. Pupils are informed of this condition to the session before they attend and the reason for it fully explained to them.

The scheme has been piloted in two schools in the area and has been considered successful. In one school it was only available to Sixth Form pupils but in the other all pupils were invited to use the service if they wished. The school nurses involved reported a slow response by pupils to the idea in the beginning, but after a few weeks the pupils felt more confident about referring themselves. The nurses also felt that the pupils needed time to relate to them, and that they needed to become 'familiar faces' in the school before this could happen.

I am introducing a similar scheme to my school in the Autumn Term of 1995. It will be organised in the same way I have described above and will be initially piloted for one term. If the response from pupils is encouraging, the sessions will continue in 1996. There

are several practical problems to overcome before the sessions can begin, finding a suitable room for example. Also, the school's Head Teacher has retired since his approval was first given for the sessions to be tried. Permission will have to be obtained from his successor before they can begin.

Other ideas for pupil self help which have not been implemented in the school as yet are lunch time and after school relaxation classes and stress management sessions. Many of our pupils travel to school by bus from their homes and after school activities are not accessible to all pupils. Lunch times activities are usually well attended. I am aiming to have some of these activities available to pupils by the beginning of 1996, hopefully staffed by outside providers. (Perhaps some of the school nurses who helped on the Health and Fitness Day).

I have been able to offer girls in Years 9 to 11 the opportunity to attend a two hour course on personal safety. In fact the course proved so popular, I booked the instructor to deliver a further two sessions. In total, fifty girls have completed the course and four female members of staff. The course concentrated on teaching some basic skills the girls could use if they found themselves in a situation where their safety is threatened; from simple moves to escape from being held by the hands and arms, to escaping from more serious situations, such as attempted rape. Although feelings of stress created by physical threat were not mentioned in the original research, they were mentioned nine times by the pupils in Year 11 who took part in the lesson on stress. If pupils feel more confident in their own coping skills and can learn some strategies to use to help themselves if they were ever in a violent or threatening situation, their stress is likely to be reduced, if only by a small amount. In the future I will be aiming to make the personal safety course a regular extra - curricular activity, available for boys as well as girls.

The pastoral curriculum for all years will continue to deliver lessons on time management and personal organisation skills. At key points in the academic year, (SATS, GCSE's, Science Modular Tests), pupils are given guidance by the Faculty concerned regarding revision programmes and techniques, perhaps the pastoral curriculum could deliver simple stress management techniques to compliment this.

One suggestion I will be putting on the agenda at the first meeting of the Health Education Committee in September 1995 is that, as a group, we produce a booklet or 'survival guide' for pupils to refer to during stressful periods of their schooling. The guide will primarily be aimed at coping effectively with revision and examinations, but will also contain suggestions for managing homework and coursework. It will contain some simple, 'user friendly' coping strategies which pupils in all years can benefit from.

A WAY FORWARD

This research has yielded many ideas which the school can, and in some instances already has, implement with the aim to improve the quality of school life for the pupils. But the ramifications of this research do not end here. The research has begun a spiralling programme of future improvement in the school which involves the identification of the sources of stress in school, the innovation of change to combat the stress created and the evaluation of these changes.

Of course it would be impossible to conduct research of this nature on a regular basis but it is possible to monitor the stress levels of the pupils in the school and the causes of this stress through the pastoral curriculum, and to continue to find ways to support pupils experiencing stress. The lesson on stress management which is now a part of the upper school pastoral curriculum will help us to gain a clearer picture of the changing nature of stress for our older pupils, not only in their schooling but in their everyday lives, and we must find time to include a similar lesson in the lower school pastoral curriculum, to identify the sources of stress for our younger pupils; we must not assume that the stressors will be the same although overlap is likely.

It is vital that the school takes on board what the pupils tell us cause them to feel stressed letting them set their own agenda, rather than what teachers think cause pupils to feel stressed. Sources of school stress must be identified from the perceptions of the pupils, not the staff. This was found to be a particularly useful technique to use in a recent study on teacher stress. In the study, groups of teachers were asked to talk among themselves about the stressors in their lives, and then to discuss them with the researcher (Jellis 1995). Jellis

found that the usual stressors associated with teachers, pay and class size for example, were not the most important concerns expressed by the teachers in the study. They were more stressed by the curriculum, recording and monitoring, lack of quality teaching time and criticism from parents ('TES' February 1996).

Once these sources of stress for pupils have been identified, we must aim to find ways to alleviate the stress they create. This is not easy to do well; sources of stress will vary and change. It is not always possible to act practically or quickly. But what we can do through the curriculum is to enable pupils to share their stress with one another and to feel that they are being listened to, and taken seriously, by their teachers. (When pupils were asked what would help them to cope with their stress on the questionnaire and in the subsequent interviews during the research period, the majority of pupils said that they would like to talk about how they feel and they would like to be listened to more by their teachers). We can also teach coping strategies and skills which empower pupils to deal with the stress in their lives more effectively. More individual help, where necessary, can be offered to pupils through referral to the School Nurse via the 'Drop In' sessions described previously. A second 'Health and Fitness Day' is currently being planned for July 1996 which will include sessions on stress management for all year groups, and will aim to teach all pupils how to recognise stress in themselves and in others, and to teach some simple coping strategies.

Teaching staff might also benefit from attending these sessions, not only to help themselves but to make them more aware of the stress pupils feel. I mentioned earlier that any school INSET on stress management was unlikely at the school at the present, but it may be possible to build something in to the Staff Development Plan in the future which takes on board not only stress management for teachers, but also: recognising stress in

pupils; the most helpful ways to respond; contributing to the update of the school's Stress Policy; reviewing what the pupils have told us about the sources of stress for them in the school from their own pastoral lessons on stress management and discussing ways to combat it.

This research was the beginning of an ongoing programme of change. Now that awareness has been raised and the issue of pupil stress taken more seriously, the school can continue to look for new initiatives to help pupils to cope with their stress. Such initiatives need evaluation and the school must make a commitment to do this, and to act on any recommendations such an evaluation might suggest. Evaluation needs to be done in consultation with pupils and staff, and needs to identify strengths and areas for improvement from the perspective of both. Evaluation should lead to planning for the future, keeping the issue of stress firmly on the school's agenda.

Since beginning this research, much has changed at the school and my colleagues and I are continuously shocked and disheartened by some of the stories our pupils tell us about their lives, both inside and outside, school. Our catchment area has changed since I began this research, and with it the nature of our Year 7 intake. Increasingly, we are finding ourselves dealing with cases of sexual abuse, neglect and emotional suffering outside school, bullying and deliberate nastiness in school, affecting both girls and boys. While the word 'stress' might not always be used by the pupils concerned, it is obvious that these pupils' lives are at times very distressing.

We have heard children (boys and girls) talk of suicide and deliberate self-harm; we have children who fight and take their aggression out on others; children who are drinking excessively and I would imagine our share of children who are taking drugs; we have children with eating disorders; we have children who have no one to go home to at the end

of the day and children who feel unwanted and unloved. For some of these children their unhappiness has been compounded by their experiences at school, others have found school a welcome relief.

Our children seem to be bringing into school with them much more potential stress than ever before; the more vulnerable children are increasingly likely to have the stress of school itself added to their burden unless we remain sensitive and alert to their needs and continue to take stress seriously as a whole school issue, being prepared not only to acknowledge its existence but to act for its assuagement. In so doing, we may well make the school experience a much more pleasant one for many pupils and make their future adult lives healthier, happier and more rewarding.

'The long term effects of stress are the problems created in adult life as a result of inappropriate behaviour patterns learned in childhood. As adults, we are the culmination of past experiences and aspirations for the future. They are difficult to shake off.'

(Mills 1992 page 124).

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION

The last decade has witnessed massive and complex change in our education system, some of the implications of which we are yet to realise. Education has constantly received media and public attention on a range of issues ranging from MP's choice of schools for their own children to failing schools identified by OFSTED inspections. Criticisms and complaints are common with little reference to the achievement and attainment of individual schools or their pupils.

It has become increasingly common to hear mention of teacher stress, low morale and overwork, long term illness in schools and the effects of early retirement on future teaching numbers. Indeed, so great is the stress thought to be that teachers belonging to one major teaching union have recently acquired their own helpline (ATL), an increasing number of books and articles are published advising teachers how to cope with their stress (Cole and Walker 1989; Gray and Freeman 1988; Kyriacou 1991; Dunham 1992; McCallion 1994) and many schools have recognised the need to include stress management in their INSET programmes.

But what of the children they teach?

They are working in the same environments as their teachers and undergoing the same changes. Their experiences will obviously be different but they are struggling through the same upheavals and chaos as their teachers but without the support, knowledge and maturity to understand many of the decisions and changes their schools may be forced to make. If popular opinion is to be believed, they are also being badly taught by overworked, stressed and cynical teachers who are desperate to leave the profession but with

increasingly fewer new graduates willing to take their place! (According to 'The Times Educational Supplement' (April 1996) The Teacher Training Agency reports a fall of 12% in applications for places on secondary teacher training courses in 1996 compared to 1995.)

If it is so bad for teachers, how must it feel for their pupils?

This research set out to discover what causes stress at school for pupils and how it makes them feel. The research is original as there is very little research of this nature which focuses specifically on pupils and school stress; defines stress in terms of both threat and challenge; includes data provided by a large number of pupils in all year groups and of all levels of ability, and which is conducted over a two year period. There is much research on childhood and adolescent stress which focuses on 'life stressors' and may incorporate more extreme aspects of school stress such as school phobia and school refusal (Capes, Gould and Townsend 1971; Lewis 1989; Alsop and McCaffrey 1993), but there is little research on what I have termed 'every day life' stress in school.

In Chapter 2 I reviewed studies which aimed to discover more about adolescents' worries and anxieties; issues related to schooling featured quite significantly in many of these studies and school is obviously a major domain of concern for many adolescents. However, there seems to be little research in Britain, dedicated specifically to every day life stress in school. This research confirms and adds to the findings of studies which have tried to address this (Kyriacou and Butcher 1993; Dunham 1989).

This research aimed to provide information about pupil stress at one particular school over a set period of time, with a view to trying to alter and improve the situations within the school which cause its pupils to feel stress. Despite, or because of this, it has implications for other schools, similar to those concerning the school where the research was conducted discussed in chapter 8.

The research is original in another respect: it suggests a different way of viewing school stress. It is driven by a transactional model of stress, rather than a response or stimulus-based model, so therefore recognises the uniqueness of individual stress responses and experiences; in keeping with this model, the definition of stress used allows for flexibility and subjectivity; school stress is viewed in terms of challenge as well as threat which offers a different dimension to school stress than can be found in other studies in this field, and it researches stress entirely from the point of view of the pupils experiencing it without adult speculation or conjecture. It assumes nothing and lets the subjects of the research define their stress according to their own perceptions and experiences. It accepts unconditionally the stress described by the subjects and does not reject the unexpected or seemingly trivial. Qualitative methods are mainly used as the only meaningful way of understanding stress from the position of the pupils experiencing it, and to gain rare insights into their lives at school and their perceptions of their schooling. As such the research adds significantly to our understanding and knowledge of what pupils find stressful in one particular school, and provides a research tool which could easily be replicated in other schools. I would anticipate similar findings if the research was reproduced in a comparable secondary school, and would suggest that the potential school stressors identified by the pupils taking part in this research, and the feelings they associate with this stress, provides a fairly exhaustive list typical of many secondary schools in the state sector.

In keeping with the author's transactional model of school stress described in Chapter 2, the research shows that pupils at this particular school, experience most stress from the aspects of their schooling which have the greatest potential to threaten self-esteem or cause pupils to experience failure, for example: examinations and coursework deadlines. However, examinations and coursework deadlines cannot be considered as a stimulus for

stress per se; they do not cause stress for all pupils or a consistent amount of stress in the pupils who do experience stress from them. It is the individual's perception of examinations and coursework deadlines as a stimulus for stress, his/her appraisal of his/her ability to cope with examinations or coursework deadlines and his/her assessment of the personal consequences of not coping, which determines whether stress will occur. The individual's range of coping strategies and their effectiveness will also help determine the acute or chronic nature of the stress response.

Pupils arriving at the school in year 7 report significantly high levels of stress at the beginning of their secondary school career with 63% of the pupils taking part in the research in 1993, and 68% in 1994, self-reporting feeling stress always, often or occasionally at school (see figure 9 in Chapter 4 and figure 21 in Chapter 6). This rises dramatically by year 11 when in 1993, 93% of the pupils taking part reported feeling stress at school always, often or occasionally, and 90% in 1994. Almost all of this stress is perceived in terms of threat rather than challenge.

The higher stress levels reported by year 11 are perhaps understandable in terms of the increased demand the nature of schooling places on these pupils, the importance of these demands and the greater opportunity they create for pupils to experience potential loss of self-esteem and failure. The significant levels of stress reported by year 7 pupils suggests that they perceive secondary school as potentially stressful before they come to the school and that they arrive at the school almost with the expectation that they will experience stress. This expectation may arise from a variety of sources: their own previous unhappy experiences at school; the experience and attitude of parents and older siblings or the media. However, how far these perceptions of potential school stress become actual stressors will vary enormously.

Within the three categories of school stress identified by this research; conflicts in relationships with peers, teachers or family members; curriculum generated stressors and every day life stressors, the potential stressors most frequently mentioned came almost exclusively from the category of curriculum generated stressors, they were: examinations, deadlines and not understanding work; outside this category the most frequently mentioned stressors were being in trouble and relationship difficulties. This is in keeping with some of the studies discussed in Chapter 2 where pupils were also given the opportunity to suggest potential school stressors and contribute to checklists (Dunham 1989; Omizo, Omizo and Suzuki 1988; Garton and Pratt 1995; Mates and Allison 1992). These potential stressors also appear in studies which use checklists compiled by both adults and pupils (Mates and Allison 1992; Millar, Gallagher and Ellis 1993; Kyriacou and Butcher 1993).

Less frequently mentioned potential stressors identified by this research included: competition (both academic and sporting), living up to other people's expectations; teachers who are themselves stressed (pupils' perception) and having to perform in front of audiences. These potential stressors are less common, or omitted, in other studies and offer new insights into pupils' perceptions of stress at this particular time. Although they may be specific to this particular school, they could also reflect some of the changes in education in the last decade I have already referred to, for example: more emphasis on competitive sport in the national curriculum; increased requirement for performance assessments in some subject specific syllabi; increasing interest in, and concern for, teacher stress, and increased pressure on young people from teachers, parents and potential employers, to succeed academically to compete for places in further education and the world of work. All these less common potential stressors conform to my original school stress model and make demands which may threaten the pupils' self-esteem and provide opportunity for potential

failure. It is interesting to note that potential stressors relating to the physical environment of the school which might feature quite significantly in teachers' assessments of potential stressors in schools, noise and over-crowded classrooms for example, (Turner 1996) are given only cursory mention by the pupils in this research. This suggests that for the pupils participating in this research at least, academic and social issues assume greater importance than the physical comfort of their working environment.

The research is also original as it is for a purpose: it is intended to promote change at the school where the research has been conducted. It was not intended that the research be sterile and unproductive; it aimed to:

- ▶ establish the existence of stress in pupils at the school
- ▶ discover the extent of stress among pupils at the school
- ▶ discover the causes of stress
- ▶ discover how stress makes pupils feel
- ▶ suggest ways to combat stress at the school

Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 fulfill the main part of these intentions where I have described in detail the extent, causes and effects of school stress on pupils and Chapter 8 suggests possible solutions to the problem of school stress at the school where the research was conducted.

I feel that this research also has implications for other secondary schools, teachers and teacher training.

If we accept that stress is a normal human response to life events and that most adults experience it, then we must also believe, in my opinion, the same is true for children.

Stress only becomes harmful when ineffective coping strategies are repeatedly employed. Although we may not enjoy feeling 'under stress', stress as such is not necessarily bad for us, indeed in my opinion it can motivate us towards greater achievements if we have learned successful coping strategies. We are likely to learn ineffective coping strategies for our stress in childhood, therefore it would seem obvious that schools have a key role to play in educating children to recognise stress and to cope effectively with it.

A Stress Policy, such as I outlined in Chapter 8, should be a fundamental policy in every school alongside the school's Ethos Statement and Anti-Bullying Policy. Schools must recognise that stress is a very real product of the school experience and make a commitment to helping their pupils manage its more negative aspects successfully. This has to be taken on board at senior management level but teachers themselves do not have to take sole responsibility for implementing a health education curriculum which includes stress management. In my experience I have found school nurses and associated professionals from Health Promotion Units more than willing to involve themselves in delivering health education in schools. Many stress management classes are run by Adult Education Centres and again, I have found their tutors happy to assist schools for no financial reward as they are committed to the belief in the value of educating the young.

Every school should think carefully about obtaining a counsellor. This idea was popular in the 1970's and to some extent in the 1980's but school counsellors are a rare commodity in the 1990's, perhaps when they are needed the most. Financial constraints may make the appointment of a school counsellor a luxury few schools can afford, but again other professionals from the Health Services may be able to help. The 'Drop In' sessions which have been running for approximately six months (at the time of writing) at the school where the research was conducted have been highly successful and are about to

be offered to an increasing number of pupils. The counsellor staffing the sessions firmly believes in its value and would also like to see it extended to other schools. It is not hard to do and involves very little extra work for teaching staff. It also needs the commitment of the school's senior management and a member of staff prepared to liaise with the health service until a suitable counsellor is found and then to liaise with the counsellor, to 'advertise' the service to the pupils and then to monitor and evaluate the progress of the counselling sessions.

I have recently been involved in evaluating the 'Drop In' sessions at the school where the research was conducted. I have interviewed male and female pupils from both Year 10 and 11 (the two year groups the sessions are aimed at) as well as the counsellor herself. The pupils at first had doubts about the confidentiality of the counselling sessions but these were soon allayed. I had introduced the counsellor to pupils at their morning assembly prior to the sessions starting. She had clarified with them what types of information could be kept confidential and what she would legally have to disclose, to either her superiors or the school. The pupils seemed reassured by this and were very supportive of the sessions. The sessions are now quite well attended and there are no occasions when pupils do not visit. During the evaluation some pupils expressed their reservations about the location of the room where the sessions are held and I am currently investigating the viability of the alternatives they have suggested.

'Drop In' sessions are a simple and effective service any school can offer to its pupils; it can be a starting point to addressing the issue of stress in their school and can offer pupils the opportunity to discuss their worries and concerns, stress related or otherwise, with a professional, non-judgemental adult (who is not also one of their teachers) and who can offer a greater degree of confidentiality than their teachers can.

Every school could address stress related issues through its pastoral curriculum. Increasingly, PSE texts include materials on stress management (Beales 1991; McConnon and McConnon 1992) with simple 'one off' lesson plans or complete modules which can be used with a variety of age groups. The activities are often practical and pupils enjoy doing them. Much can be covered in relatively short spaces of time. This could be a starting point for pupils monitoring their own stress and that of their peers. Pupils might like to be encouraged to find out for themselves the stressors in their own schools. Questionnaires, along the lines of the one used for this research, could be issued by pupils and/or interested staff to discover the extent of stress in their own schools. Pupils could become involved in 'working parties' investigating stressors and trying to find solutions to their own particular 'high stress' problem areas. (If it is not possible to address the issue of stress in the pastoral curriculum it can be addressed as a cross - curricular issue as I suggested in Chapter 8).

There is a strong case for future teacher training to take the issue of school stress on board, either in the context of health education or PSE, or under the umbrella of pastoral care. Young teachers entering the profession may well be more empathetic to the potential problems pupils might face at school, having only recently finished their own education. If they are aware of the signs of stress in children and the possible sources of school stress they may well be in the position to be proactive in their own classrooms and more responsive to any 'anti stress' measures the school might be trying to adopt. I mentioned in Chapter 4 that when I began my research into pupil stress at my own school, there were a few members of staff who felt that pupils did not feel stress and that I should be researching teacher stress instead; most of these comments came from older, more experienced staff, who still remain quite unsympathetic towards the notion of school stress in pupils, perhaps reflecting their own teacher training which would not have included the more holistic

approach to children's learning. Younger staff therefore, are in quite a unique position to influence change in their schools.

However, it seems that despite the growth of interest in stress in teachers, little help is offered to student teachers in this area (Grant 1992). A recent experience of my own confirms this. In January 1997 I was asked to organise and deliver INSET on stress management for four NQT's at the school. The session revealed an incredible range of potential stressors for these new teachers and a surprising lack of awareness of stress management techniques or where to seek support. These teachers had had no input on stress management on their PGCE courses and seemingly little preparation in what to expect from their first year of teaching, other than their final teaching practice. The idea of pupil stress was received with empathy and interest, but with little understanding of its possible causes or outcomes.

At the start of this conclusion I referred to the many changes we have seen in education in the last decade. We are now entering a period of promised stability with no significant innovation on the horizon. Perhaps during this period of calm teachers will be able to put aside the paperwork, adjust to their own changed circumstances and feel less pressured themselves for long enough to really observe what is happening to their pupils and in their classrooms. If teachers feel so keenly the turmoil of a decade's upheaval and disruption then they cannot deny their pupils must feel it too, to a greater or lesser extent. Perhaps now it is time to implement some of our own less radical change; change which seeks to make life at school a less threatening and overwhelming experience for some of our pupils.

In schools, as in life, there will always be issues we are unhappy about but which we can never change and must therefore accept; there are issues which are difficult to change

but can be changed, if we have the courage to attempt it; and some issues which remain unchallenged because of our silence.

Pupil stress and school stress exist; both are issues that schools can address if there is the vision, determination and commitment to try.

APPENDIX ONE

***AN EXAMPLE OF THE PILOT QUESTIONNAIRE
USED IN 1992***

***AN EXAMPLE OF THE ACTUAL QUESTIONNAIRE USED
IN 1993 AND 1994***

STRESS QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer the following questions as carefully and as honestly as you can. Leave out any you do not understand or feel unable to answer.

Age:	13 yrs
Year Group:	9F
Gender:	MALE
Father's Occupation:	PERLINE DESIGN OFFICER (WORKS FOR BRITISH GAS)
Mother's Occupation:	HOUSEWIFE AND PART TIME COAST GUARD (HAD HER OWN COMPANY)
Nationality:	BRITISH
No. of Sisters:	0
No. of Brothers:	3

The term 'stress' is often used to describe dangerous, potentially harmful or unpleasant situations which cause us to feel physically uncomfortable or threatened and make us feel anxious, nervous, worried or frightened. However, stress is not always a disagreeable experience; it can be very challenging, motivating us and bringing us positive rewards.

1. Do you agree with this description of stress?

Yes	No
✓	

If No, suggest a better description.

2. Have you ever felt stress?

Always	Often	Occasionally	Never
	✓		

3. Do you ever feel stress :-

	Always	Often	Occasionally	Never
at home ?			✓	
at school ?		✓		
with friends ?			✓	
when alone ?			✓	

Any different occasions? Please state.

I feel alot of stress when with people who ridicule me (because of my religion mostly)

4. Describe how you feel when you experience stress.

I get angry and sometimes curse at other people by shouting. I feel like crying and have anger in me sometimes. Sometimes I try to get laughing to get rid of the stress.

5. Describe an occasion when you felt especially stressed.
What happened, how did you feel?

I once felt especially stressed when some people in our community were ridiculing me because of my religion. At first I argued back and ridiculed them too. After a while, I took no notice of them and started to move about it. This put me in a bad mood and I was very depressed that night.

6. Describe an occasion when you felt stressed at school.
What happened, how did you feel?

Another occasion was when my class was moved and I was
spat on. This made me very mad and eventually, I was invol-
ed in a fight and got into quite a bit of trouble. I wanted
that a group were really funny with me and my friends to get
revenge and my class got moved out and I was sent to my room.

7. Are there any other situations at school which have made you feel stressed?

Yes	No
✓	

Describe them briefly eg. coursework demands, bullying etc.

A lot of the time, I get stressed over course work. Handling up a piece
of course work online. I get stressed when I try to have and
spend too long on a piece of work to make it look as good as
I need to get released because I had a very mild form of stress.

8. What other school situations might make you, or other pupils, feel stressed?

I think people get stressed when too much homework is loaded
on them, and they don't get any spare time. I think they
also get stressed when exams come on, and they try to revise
for hours on end. This really builds pressure up on you to do
well in exams.

9. Do you think many school pupils feel stressed at some time during their school life?

None	A few	Some	Quite a lot	Many	All
				✓	

10. Do you think girls feel more stressed than boys?

Yes	No	The same
		✓

11. Do you think boys feel more stressed than girls?

Yes	No	The same
		✓

12. Do you think stress at school changes as you get older and move up the school?

Increases	Decreases	Stays the same
✓		

13. Do the things which cause the stress change?

Yes	No
✓	

If yes, in what way do they change?

They change as you get older and more mature. You don't realize how stressed you are to get stressed over silly little things that didn't bother you before.

14. When you feel stressed is there anything you do which helps you feel better?

Yes I sweat running races, or talking them to other people, this moves them along and me. Sometimes when I'm stressed out while back I punch the wall as hard as I can, but not me, but it also helps get the anger out. Sometimes I just sit down and read a book or draw. I just think about other things to get stress off my mind.

15. Do you know of anything you could do to help yourself, but do not do?

I could do my hair to do hairstyle, or take properly, by seeing
but like I have and that time I have to do that I take
on each when.

16. Are most of your friends the same sex as you?

Yes	No	About half and half
✓		

17. Do you ever notice any of your friends suffering from stress?

Yes	No
	✓

If yes, how can you tell?

18. Do you ever talk to your friends about how you feel?

Yes	No
✓	

19. Do your friends ever talk to you about how they feel?

Yes	No
✓	

20. Have you ever gone to an adult for advice when feeling stressed?

Yes	No
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If yes, who did you go to?

I went to my mum when I was being ridiculed about my smoking (I don't have an addiction and I've been taken off the tablets, I've immediately quit and I've grown out of it)

21. Do you think schools should do more to help pupils who are suffering from stress?

Yes	No
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If yes, can you make any suggestions about what could be done?

I think that it's just up to the teacher, I think that if a person is feeling stressed about work etc, he/she should tell the teacher and then maybe something could be done about it e.g. give a pupil more time to hand in a piece of coursework if he/she is loaded up with other homework.

22. How would you describe your health?

Very good	Good	Average	Below average	Poor
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

23. Do you suffer from minor complaints?

Seldom	Sometimes	Frequently	Never
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Give examples.

Most of the time I get headaches from a wide variety of things. The doctor says it may be to do with the fact that I'm overworked and my pressure.

24. Do you suffer from any major disorder or disability?

Yes	No
	✓

If yes, please specify.

--

25. What is your school attendance record like?

Excellent	Very good	Good	Average	Below average	Poor	Very poor
✓						

26. Do you ever experience any of the following :-

	Always	Often	Occasionally	Never
Anxiety				
Aggression			✓	
Boredom		✓		
Depression			✓	
Tiredness			✓	
Bad temper			✓	
Nervousness		✓		
Loneliness			✓	
Lacking in confidence			✓	
Headaches			✓	
Upset stomach			✓	
Chest or back pain			✓	
Nightmares				✓
Loss of sleep			✓	
Asthma				✓
Generally feeling 'unwell'			✓	

27. Any other comments you would like to make about your experiences of stress or this questionnaire?

28. Would you be prepared to be interviewed (in confidence) about some of your experiences of stress?

Yes	No

If yes, please give your name and your tutor group.

Name:	
Tutor Group:	

Thank you for your time and honesty in filling in this questionnaire.

STRESS QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer the following questions as carefully and as honestly as you can. Leave out any you do not understand or feel unable to answer.

Age:			
Year Group:			
Gender: (M/F)			
Father's Occupation:			
Mother's Occupation:			
Nationality:			
No. of Sisters:		No. of Brothers:	
Position in the Family:			

The term 'stress' is often used to describe dangerous or possibly harmful situations which make us feel physically uncomfortable or threatened. It might also make us feel anxious, nervous, worried or frightened. However, stress is not always an unpleasant experience. It can be very challenging. It can motivate us and bring positive benefits.

1. Do you agree with this description of stress?

Yes	No

If No, suggest a better description.

--

2. Have you ever felt stress?

Always	Often	Occasionally	Never

3. Do you ever feel stress :-

	Always	Often	Occasionally	Never
at home ?				
at school ?				
with friends ?				
when alone ?				

Any different occasions? Please state.

--

4. Describe how you feel when you experience stress.

--

5. Describe any school situations which might make you, or other pupils, feel stress.

--

6. Do you think many school pupils feel stressed at some time during their school life?

None	A few	Some	Quite a lot	Many	All

7. Do you think girls feel more stressed than boys?

Yes	No	The same

8. Do you think boys feel more stressed than girls?

Yes	No	The same

9. Do you think stress at school changes as you get older and move up the school?

Increases	Decreases	Stays the same

10. Do the things which cause the stress change?

Yes	No

If yes, in what way do they change?

11. When you feel stressed is there anything you do which helps you feel better?

12. Do you know of anything you could do to help yourself, but do not do?

13. Are most of your friends the same sex as you?

Yes	No	About half and half

14. Do you ever notice any of your friends suffering from stress?

Yes	No

If yes, how can you tell?

15. Do you ever talk to your friends about how you feel?

Yes	No

16. Do your friends ever talk to you about how they feel?

Yes	No

17. Have you ever gone to an adult for advice when feeling stressed?

Yes	No

If yes, who did you go to?

18. Do you think schools should do more to help pupils who are suffering from stress?

Yes	No

If yes, can you make any suggestions about what could be done?

19. How would you describe your health?

Very good	Good	Average	Below average	Poor

20. Do you suffer from minor complaints?

Seldom	Sometimes	Frequently	Never

Give examples.

21. Do you suffer from any major disorder or disability?

Yes	No

If yes, please specify.

22. What is your school attendance record like?

Never Absent:	
Absent one or two days each year:	
Absent about one week each year:	
Absent one or two days each term:	
Absent one or more weeks each term:	
Absent more frequently:	

23. Any other comments you would like to make about your experiences of stress or this questionnaire?

24. Would you be prepared to be interviewed (in confidence) about some of your experiences of stress?

Yes	No

If yes, please give your name and your tutor group.

Name:	
Tutor Group:	

Thank you for your time and honesty in filling in this questionnaire.

APPENDIX TWO

WRITTEN EXAMPLES OF PUPILS' STRESSFUL EXPERIENCES AT SCHOOL

***THE PUPILS' OWN WORDS AND EXPRESSION HAVE BEEN
USED THROUGHOUT***

Thursday, 14 April

It was the start of term today. I never look forward to it. It's not so much the school ~~and~~ work. It's more the things that go with school. Things like friends, play times and dinners, getting up early, walking home from school. A lot of the problems here are not problems all the time and are just trivial but if they all come at once it can be very hard to cope.

My first day seemed to go alright. We have been set a piece in English to prepare a personal piece of writing for tomorrow. I just spent $\frac{1}{2}$ of an hour thinking about it because we just had a few choices to choose from. What I decided is ~~also~~ alright but Mrs. Brain talks about pieces other 5th years have written and how there really good but she doesn't

tell us why there really good. She
just keeps repeating herself again.
I always worry about pieces of
~~written~~ work how it might not
be brilliant. I think I worry too
much and take ~~failor~~ failure very
seriously. Too seriously perhaps?
I think you can bring a lot of
stress on yourself, ~~and~~ unnecessary
stress.

Monday, 18 April

Today I played Badminton and usually I'm the only girl (that I play with) but it's alright because everyone's very nice but today another girl came. I didn't really talk to her at first because I didn't know what to say and I didn't want to break the silence but in the changing rooms at the end I did. I felt a lot better a lot after this and I was sorry I didn't talk to her before. I was worried she wouldn't like me or I'd say something stupid. I wonder if she was thinking that as well.

Wednesday 20th April.

I had to finish reading a book today because it was due back at the library the next day. It was a rush but it was a quick evening.

We are starting the orchestra tomorrow. I'm really nervous but I usually am when I start something new. I am going with Stacey my friend so it's not so bad. I play the clarinet and I'm working towards my grade 1 in the summer. It's really nerve racking. I'm practising every night and the same songs over and over. I think orchestra will be a nice change. I do really enjoy joining clubs and getting involved but it is a responsibility so I always try and chose things I really enjoy. Then I don't find it so hard to drag myself there every session.

Saturday, 23rd April

My Auntie and Uncle have come to visit with their two sons. The ages are Robert $2\frac{1}{2}$ and Richard $\frac{1}{4}$ of a year old. It's hard work.

Richard was crying this afternoon and I asked my mum why he was. She said there was no reason. He must be crying about something.

I kept ~~thing~~ thinking he must be in pain. I know he isn't but it's so tiring and you try and stop him crying ~~by~~ pulling a face or something but he cries even more and that's the worst thing. He did (Richard) chuckle at me ~~for the~~ today and it's the first time he's ever chuckled so that's an achievement.

Tuesday 26th April

They've gone now. My Auntie +
uncle that is. I had a play with
Robert last night. Before they
had children when we visited
there house (which is up in Northumber-
land in the middle of nowhere)
~~and~~^{we'd} chat with them and stay
up until the morning laughing. We
can't really do that any more. I
know it's selfish but they were
the only adult friends I had. I
don't mind really but there really
tired all the time & and we never
talk ~~to~~ anymore. We only see them
about 3 times a year for a
couple of days and I am not as
close with them as I was. I'm
not saying that they shouldn't
have children because ~~of~~ they
won't be like they used to be, because
everything changes. Things move on

and nothing last forever but it's
sort of the end of an era. Just
a little one that doesn't really matter
but there will be lots of others
and it's sad but there will also
be starts of new eras and new
friend relationships.

Saturday, 29th April

I have been ill for the past couple of days. I have been sick. I was being sick for a whole day. It was really horrible. I hate being sick. My dad hasn't been sick for 7 years! I just ~~had to~~ ~~type~~ lay on my bed waiting for the pain to get worse and worse until I knew I had to go to the toilet.

The worse thing was knowing that I couldn't escape the pain. When you're in the middle of a lesson you hate it at least you know you could walk out of it and get away. You wouldn't do it of course but it's always there just in case. I think the most upsetting thing was knowing I couldn't get away and not knowing when it would stop.

Monday 2nd April May -

It's a bank holiday today and a lovely day at that. I've been outside planting some potatoes and generally pottering about relaxing. Mum and Liz were out too. Probably a lot of other people would be in their gardens. The man next door didn't think about this or he didn't care. He decided to start a fire. It was only 3.30pm. He burned woods so there was loads of awful smelly smoke.

Everyone had to go inside. Washing was brought in and things put away. Windows were closed and even the cats came in. How selfish can you be. Mum stood at the window tutting for about half an hour not believing it.

I was really angry but there was nothing I could do so I tried

to stay calm. It may seem silly and trivial but we could and should be out there in the sun not looking out of a smoky window. Why don't people think?

Thursday 5th May

Today in the evening I went to see Macbeth at the Theatre Royal Nottingham. I had never been to a theatre before and I can't wait to go again. Dad had read the play in the last week or so and had tried to explain it to me as simply as possible. I was worried that I wouldn't understand it but most of it I understood or got the idea. I was completely unaware of what was going on around me for most nearly all of the time. It really drew me in and I worried for

the characters and also the sets. I had sat there for over 3 hours and only thought it was about 3 minutes!

The next day I bored all my friends with descriptions of the scene and now I am constantly trying to persuade my dad to take me again. He only goes about 3 times a year. I don't think I'll forget it for a while. Macbeth was actually played by an understudy but it didn't bother me. I really believed they were those people and they were living those lives.

Sunday
~~Saturday~~, 7th May

Last night having my friend had a sleepover for her birthday. We talked until the morning. I finally went to sleep at 3.30am. There were 6 other girls besides me. The thing is if you talk for 6 hours you run out of things to say or you start letting out your deepest & darkest secrets. One of the 6 girls called Anna said lots of things that happened to her. She told story upon story about burglaries and knives being stuck in her sides and being locked in a cupboard for a very long time by a gang who pushed a pushchair (which had a baby in) down the hill and into a brook. The thing is she couldn't have made all of these up but it just seems like a lot's happened to her. The other thing is her mum had a divorce and now Anna's got a step

father who she's not that keen on
I don't think. She's also been
moved around a lot. I don't want
to judge whether I think she's
being truthful because I don't know
much about her but it's annoying
when you don't know what the
truth is. I wonder if I'll ever find
out. I'm not going to try I know
that.

Monday 9th May =

Today we were surprised to have our job. Rumors often run not when jobs are mentioned. It was our TB job. There were all sorts of rumors about seven needles up your arm, flames to heat up the needles and even people fainting and crying. I decided to ask my elder sister if this was true. She explained that the tester ~~has~~ doesn't hurt and the needle just a little bit. We didn't actually ~~have~~ have the job today so now we're just waiting impatiently for it.

Tuesday, 10th May

Today was the day that I had to have two teeth extracted so there would be room for my front teeth to get pushed back. I had been trying to forget it since I was told the date but ~~to~~ as I was being drove to the dentist and ~~sitting~~ ^{I was waiting in the waiting} room the fear grew larger and larger. I tried to pass the time by reading a magazine but the words slipped by me. In my head I was thinking of the extraction.

When I had to go in I had 4 injections to send my gum to sleep. Two of those were very nasty. Then I waited in the waiting room again. My dad was there but I didn't really want him to be. I guess I thought if I saw a sympathetic face I burst into tears. The waiting was

the worst. My lips felt like they were getting bigger and bigger and I was convinced I looked stupid. There was a little boy in the waiting room and I kept thinking he was looking at me.

When my teeth were finally pulled out I went home and my gums bled for 4 hours. What a day. The thing is I have been hurt more by just falling over but I didn't feel like that I think it was just because I knew what was going to happen and I knew there would be pain. I expected a lot but in the end I was quite dissatisfied!

Wednesday 11th May

I have been practising my clarinet. I've got a grade 1 exam in the Summer. I've never been to one before. We've got 3 pieces to play among other exercises. I've been practicing the same pieces for weeks and it's really boring. We also always seem to miss P.E. and I like P.E. so that ~~of~~ can be a bit aggravating. All in All I enjoy Clarinet and want to do many more grades after this but it's such a slow process and I keep just wanting to be really good magically. It sounds stupid but we don't seem to have got anywhere for months. I'll just have to ~~of~~ keep going and keep trying. I thought it would be easy!

Thursday, 12th May

Today I was playing on the park with my friends. We were racing round some trees and timing ourselves. Dana was going to race but Stacey complained that she wasn't in the right place. It was only a footstep away and she didn't want to tread there because she was bare foot. I said it didn't matter. Stacey then said "Right, we'll knock a second off," I said that it was only one footstep. Dana ran she got 7 seconds then Stacey said right add another second on I repeated it was only one footstep turned to start the next race and heard Stacey muttering "Fine. O.k. 7 seconds. Sarah's always right 7 seconds then," I thought God ~~abblimey~~ abblimey it's only a race timed by a three handed watch.

Friday 20th May

Today I was on the park with friends and I was talking to one of them who had been to the sleep over and they were saying how they had thought Anna had alot happen to her and she had heard from Anna's friend ~~how~~ (one of the things that Anna had said was she had been bullied and was now seeing a social worker) Zoe (Anna's friend) had accidentally started talking about how Anna had been bullied and had a social worker ~~and~~ Anna's mum and Anna's ^{was} said that she had never been bullied and didn't go to a social worker. Anna wasn't there at the time.

I don't know what to think about this. I don't know who to

believe. I don't think that I
should get involved ~~at~~ or pass
on this information. I don't
want to stay away from Anna because
I don't know what's going on.
I'm just going to stay out of it and
hope the truth comes out soon. It's
very confusing and worrying. What if
Anna is lying? What if she isn't?
Who knows? I think I'll just
forget about it and not get too close
to Anna. I don't know the full story,
I don't know how it is ^{for Anna} how can I
judge.

I have often noticed that if I'm not paying attention to Stacey or playing with someone else she does go very madly. I never say anything but it really upsets me. We used to be best friends but I explained some time ago I didn't want to be anymore neither of us have found new best friends but if I ever talk to anyone that's both our friends and start getting pally with them the next thing I know Stacey's chatting with them. I know she's only chatting and I don't think she's a bad person but I don't think she wants me to have a new best friend. I really sound like I'm boasting and I probably am but if it's true there's nothing can do anyway.

25
Wednesday, 18th May

Today I planted some more things in my vegetable garden. I got it at about March and I planted some cabbages out and they all died straight away. This was quite upsetting and I didn't pay any attention to it for a few weeks but then I got some seeds and planted them and there growing. I'm really happy. So far I've planted, radishes, beans, lettuce, sweetcorn, sunflowers and morning glories. It's great to see them growing. I ~~did~~^{did most of} it all by myself. There's still a lot of work but I really enjoy it and can't wait to see the end result.

Friday, 27th May

It's the end of half the summer term and nearly the end of the year. It's gone so fast. I haven't done half the things I wanted to do. Time seems to move faster the older you get or maybe things just take longer.

Well both my elder sisters have finished school and collage.

I've got three more years! They will now both be doing exams so this should be happy in this house!

I'm glad I have elder sisters because you can learn from them and you know what to expect.

During this diary I haven't written all my problems down because I didn't have time or didn't remember to write them down but I hope it will help. This is what life is like for me and these are the sort of problems I have.

DIARY

Monday 21st June

I had quite a stressful day today, especially this morning. Becka wasn't talking to me much. It felt like she was ignoring me. We ended up late for school - again. Due yet again, to Becka's timekeeping. Me and Stacey get to her house about 8.15am every morning but she's never ready.

First lesson we had English. I felt so lonely because no one was really communicating with me. I just got on with my work. Becka said just two words to me before Break.

Humanities straight after-break and I was so annoyed and branned off with Becka. She'd make some snarky remark and yet another sarcastic comment. This is when I also remembered I hadn't done my Maths homework. I forgot to ask for a sheet on Friday. I'm just so fed up and sick of hearing her sarcastic and hurting remarks.

I know for a fact I'm not the only one. She got on the wrong side of a lot of people today. I don't think she realises how much she can hurt people. She never really thinks of any one else's feelings. Sometimes I could just turn around and tell her what I think of her. But I haven't the courage or confidence to stand up for myself. She's so overpowering. It scares me. Because my confidence is lacking when she's around.

Everything went okay this afternoon, for once. I got a great result with Becka. We got our Maths results back, I did ~~well~~ well. Our homework wasn't asked to be given in, which was a big relief.

I know tomorrow will be a complete stress free day. Mainly because Becka's not at school. No tension! But also because it's Sports Day so it should be a good day. I sometimes feel guilty about talking the way about Becka that I do.

I am now. But I can't help the way I feel sometimes and it's not just me who complains about her bad mood and general bitchiness. In fact, I don't know anyone who doesn't complain. But I suppose, no one's perfect.

Tuesday, 22nd June

And I thought today would be stress free! Well I was wrong. It was a good day, I enjoyed sports day. I did well in my events. Especially Discus. Our Form did brilliant and we won overall or so we thought. But something happened which none of our form was pleased about. We were all so annoyed due to the bad sportsmanship of some people. The main story is that we got disqualified from one event which we came first in so we lost the points and so a different form won. What we didn't like about it was the unfairness and the fact that the people who

complained about us competing only. Did it because they thought they'd win. We think they were just bad losers because we beat their team. But they didn't win in the end anyway. So it wasn't worth it. I was depressing because we'd put so much effort into it and we deserved to win.

Thursday ~~2nd~~^{4th} June

I can't believe the events of today. Everything's all in the open and we're all starting a fresh. Well, at school today Becka was going off with Helen as usual. Then after school we had an argument. Me, Becka and Stacy were there. Everything came out in the open. It's such a relief. We all feel a lot better for it. It was really starting to get me down. Helen doesn't know about it yet. But we've all decided to be honest from now.

Friday 25th June

Everything was great today. We all got on brilliant. I felt so happy, in glad everything is sorted. The only one who isn't happy is Helen. She says she is, but we all think she isn't. Helen's the only one who lost something from this, the rest of us all gained friendship. Helen lost some of it.

We've got the Science exam next Thursday. I'm dreading it. It's the only one I'm not looking forward to. I'm not very confident in Science and don't feel I'm going to do very well. We've got to revise lots next week. We've also got a Technology exam the week after. Thank god we haven't lag left until the holidays. I need a break, especially after the exams. I can't imagine what it'll be like when my GCSE's come around, it's terrible now.

The new First years came

up today I remember when I was in
there position I was so nervous it
doesn't seem five minutes ago. I've
changed in a way that I'm more
confident - even though I don't feel
it - I also talk more, I used to be
shy and still am in a way but
I've nearly grown out of it. If I had
the choice I'd rather be in my
position than there's. This time
last week I'd have rather been
a first year again. But things are
different now. I just hope they
keep this way.

Wednesday 30th June.

Tomorrow is the Science Exam.
I'm not looking forward to it. This
is my worst subject, I don't feel
at all confident about it. I've
revised a bit tonight but I don't
understand it all. I'm trying to cram
it all in my brain and just hope
for the best. I wish I'd ~~waited~~

Worked harder in science this year. My heart's not in it. We get to improve it next year. No waste - only taking one science option!

Bedra was away today - her last day before going on holiday. She's not very well. I wish I was going on holiday. I'd love to get away for a bit and leave all the stress behind. So I can't just relax. But on the six weeks holidays!

Thursday 1st July

It was very tough. The science exam was really hard. A lot harder than everyone expected it to be. I don't think we did very well at all. We had to answer all the questions even though we hadn't learnt about half of them. Other groups were allowed to miss them out.

Friday 2nd July

Not another exam! We got told today that we've got a technology exam next Friday. It lasts 1 1/2 hours. Another subject in poor at we haven't got much to revise. Half of it's a imaginative question which you have to design something. I'll never be able to do that. I don't know anything about Electronics or Woodwork.

In Tute or group today we did some work on problem pages and we had to answer some problems. It was a laugh. I really enjoyed it. It was a nice change. Also it was good because it was work and pleasure at the same time.

This week has been great. I've hardly been stressed at all. This friendship problem is totally resolved. Everyone is getting on great and having a good time. Also, we're all in good moods. I hope this unstressful

time carries on - preferably forever.

Wednesday 7th July.

Life without Bedla is wonderful, it's totally stress free. Me and Helen are getting on great. This week's been really good so far. We've got a tec. exam on Friday. It's for 1 1/2 hours I can't do Technology! but it's really hard.

Friday 9th July.

The Tec exam was quite easy. I finished in 50 mins. I think we done well. We got our reports today. We had to bring them home. Mine are really good and my parents are pleased. Bedla didn't come back to school today. Stacy told me that nothing has changed even after our chat. I'm creating

her coming back to school if its still bad I went to see her ~~there~~ tonight after school she was fine with me and didn't have a tantrum. I don't know though maybe Stacey is right in time she'll become as normal but she seems to have changed her attitude to me. Maybe she's starting to realize just what a good mate I am with out me, she'd be nowhere. We been through everything with her. I know her ~~&~~ inside out.

Monday 12th July.

Life's wonderful! Becca has changed and seen sense. After school today we had a chat she told me how she feels. She wants to be best mates with me again. She said that she realizes that she took me for granted by thinking I'd always be there for her. Now she says she doesn't want

to lose my friendship. This talk was very open and I told her how I feel too. So now we're best mates again. We've just got to tell Helen now we don't know how she'll take it.

I feel abit guilty though because Stacey's getting left out now. Her and Becka didn't get on very well on Holiday and now there's alot of friction between them. I'm in the middle. Stacey was telling me about their arguments and Becka has to live got two different sides of the story. I feel guilty about Stacey because she's been there for me when Becka wasn't. Now we gone crawling back to Bec and it somehow doesn't feel right.

Wednesday 14th July

Becka and Stacey are getting on better now. It still isn't the same.

as before I'm still stuck in the middle of it. I hate it when you get in this situation it's like being torn in two halves I have been on Stacey's side all the time lately because we've both been in the same position. But me and Becka have become much closer this week I don't want to say anything against her I just don't feel right. I hope everything gets better I can't cope with much more of this.

Friday 16th July

They're getting on okay now Stacey had started to get really paranoid by saying that me, Becka and Helen were all ignoring her. This isn't true. Anyway, they're on good terms again and have got things at in the open. I'm glad about that. It's a weight off my mind.

We been getting on with Becka great all week but today she

started to annoy me. Just some
of the things she said and did.
We still got on fine though. I just
found her irritating.

It's Helen's birthday on
Sunday. Tomorrow me and Becka
are sleeping at Helen's. We're looking
forward to it. A girls night in. It
should be a laugh. I hope everyone
gets on alright.

Monday 19th July.

Becki was away today.
She's had another asthma attack
and has gone to hospital. I feel
sorry for her, it must be horrible
(sometimes panic when she
has a bad one I can't imagine
to think what she feels. I
know that sometimes it's so
bad she thinks she's going to
die. She's told me that. A lot
of the teachers have started
worrying because she's missing

So much work. I hate to think what it'll be like for the next 2 years. She'll miss loads of course-work. She told me that she won't be off next year... but she will.

Tuesday 20th July

Well, Becka was coming back to school but she didn't quite make it. She had an attack on the way to school. It was a really bad one. Stacey ran up to school and got help. Mr. Crowe came and took Becka to Stacey's house. Stacey's dad took Becka to hospital. I couldn't really concentrate all day because I kept wondering what had happened. Anyway, I know she's alright now. We've only got 2 days left of school.

Wednesday 21st July

Last day tomorrow. This year has gone so fast. Lots of things have

happened. At the beginning of the year Becka and I were best mates, we were inseperable. Now things are different. I'm alot closer to Helen now. Also during the year we've come good mates with Stacey again.

I've been in the middle of arguments so many times. We had a lot of big disagreements with another group of friends in which I wasn't involved. Things got very upsetting. Anyway, I'm pleased with my work this year, I've achieved a lot. Everything seems to be getting better.

I don't want to leave tomorrow. None of us do. Me, Helen, Daniel, Rob, Mark, Stuart etc. We've been so close lately. Now we're not going to see each other in nearly 7 weeks. All the lads said they'd come and see us, I hope they do. I think Dan and Rob will as they've been to my house before. I still don't want to

break up tomorrow. Helen and I think we may cry. Next year we'll all be split up. If we're this bad now, what'll it be like in ~~1~~ year 11 when we actually leave? I don't want this time to come.

I found out some of the groups for next year. Me, Becka and Helen are together in English and Humanities. I'm pleased with the teachers I have got so far.

Next year I want things to stay pretty much like they are now. I want all three of us - Helen, Becka and I - to be best friends. Hopefully Becka will learn to control her temper and then she may let me and Helen get closer. I don't want Stacy to get left out though. I'd feel guilty. I hope next year is a successful year and also one of good friendship.

Monday 19th April

Today wasn't too bad, I got slightly worried
in classes when we realised that
we hadn't been told about revision
technique - only told to 'revise' - where
(with French and German) shall I start?

It made me feel a little out of
control - I ~~had~~^{have} to manage my time
very efficiently between now and
my exams. It gave me a ~~bad~~
bit of a headache.

Tonight though, I made a
revision timetable, though I'm
still not sure how I should be
revising! It is worrying when
our exams are barely weeks
away.

This may have been positive
stress because it motivated
me to do a timetable.

Sat 24th April

Well here I am at the end of week one - this only being the second entry - not through lack of dedication but because I haven't been too stressed this ~~week~~ week due to the finished coursework. Now I have to revise for my exams but at this stage I'm not too bothered about them :- I'm working on past papers and different revision.

Friday was quite stressful. I did a huge 2 french reading past papers and couldn't do anything without having to look words up in the dictionary. Also we marked maths ~~past~~ papers that we'd do and I got really low marks - Low!

In the afternoon we had a Drama exam where we were given a stimulus to work from in groups and an external Moderator/examiner watched and was marking us all.

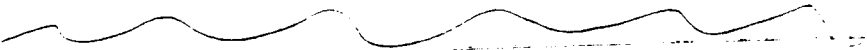
afternoon - I felt nervous and
edgy - a little tense

I am really tired I've
done alot of work (revision
etc) and I know I've got alot
more to do. The thing that gives
me the strength to carry on
is my faith - I'm a Christian and
regularly go to church - we have
an ~~and~~ youth group as well,
it's really good.

People think Christianity
is something to lean on well
it is but I believe leaning on
God is the true way. It's basically
get a feeling inside & reach
out to something and many
end up reaching out to drugs
alcohol etc which gets you ~~into~~ ~~the~~
nowhere. People can ~~and~~ go but I am
always there for you.

At the moment I feel
like I can't get enough sleep -
I think it's because I've
got so much to do my brain

doctor's step. Mum gave me
a face and shoulder massage last
night - it didn't do anything for
me - she thinks I was too late.



Thursday 20th May.

Up until now my 'stress level' has been down because we've left school and so are able to revise at our own pace.

Today though was my first exam - I nearly didn't make it. Last night I'd planned everything so well and it all went out the window! ~~Wow~~ Souchori - I think it was because I was tired from revising - I set my alarm for 8:10am instead of 7:10am (we had to be at school for the exam for 8:45am to start at ~~8:45~~ 9:00am). Anyway I just got out the shower at 8:40! and looked at my watch and realised what I'd done. School is 15 mins walk from my house. I flung a towel around myself and ran down stairs and yelled "Mum I'm nearly to be at school".

in 5 minutes to start at 9 o'clock.

My hands were shaking and my head was spinning - I was totally panicked.

Mum said "Go and get dressed". I ran upstairs and changed my clothes on - I didn't even dry myself or brush my teeth. I ran back downstairs and mum said she'd phoned for a taxi (we haven't got a car). The taxi didn't come till 8.50. I was meant to be there at 8.45. All I kept thinking was "What if they don't let me in, what's the worst that could happen - I'd get a D or E for not doing this part of the exam."

We got to school at 8.55 am. I just belted through the hall and up to room 12.

It was OK - I could still go on. I sat down, I felt so drained - my head was spinning.

When I got home I didn't do
any revision that day cause it
had made me so tired, drowsy
and I had eye ache and so
didn't want to risk a migraine
#

It took about 3 days to get
myself back together again.

24th May

Today I had my French writing exam - I got there OK this time! I prayed all the way up to school and it really helped - I didn't feel nervous at all. The exam went pretty well as well.

25th May

Today I had my German listening exam - I didn't do quite as well as I'd hoped but I did my best. My stomach felt a little bit jittery. I also find that as soon as I sit down to do an exam, my hands start shaking and my lips - my eyes ache a little too.

Well I'm now at the end of
my exams thank goodness I haven't
written any entries because I
seemed to be fine for the rest
of the exams. Anyway during
the last two weeks of my exams,
I started getting chronic stomach
pains which I thought were linked
to me being on my period, they
didn't stop though. It gave me
diarrhoea also and for two nights
I didn't get to sleep until around
4 am because of it. As soon
as I went to bed, they started,
I was in and out of bed
because of the pain, I tried
sleeping on the floor but that
didn't work either. Then
one day mum said she
thought it was nerves and
after looking back at the
patterns I knew it was.

If I was coming up to an exam or someone had been talking about them I used to get the pains.

Once I knew what it was, I was able to control it more or less. When going to bed I would listen to a tape to relax me and do deep breathing. I also prayed about it and all these things worked. The thing was that I wasn't consciously stressed or worried, but it was subconsciously. That's why I didn't know why I was getting the pains etc.

I think it would be a good help to have someone at school who you could talk to and who would recognize

stress symptoms and suggest
ways of relaxing and controlling
stress. I think the only barrier
would be that the pupils
may see him/her as a shrink
and be shy to go and see
them because of that. Other
kids may say I think there
would have to definitely be
a confidentiality system.

Also the coordinator would
have to be someone the
pupils could relate with.

April 19th

Today was the start of school again after a week of dreaded hard revision. In some ways that seems really weird in saying that because I never really fitted in at school for my first 4 years, but this last year I have felt really happy and so confident. Last year was my worst year ever - people made a huge impression on me, calling me, talking about me - things which I let get to me, which shouldn't have done, I lost my self-confidence, I became paranoid and very unhappy. It seems really silly to me now, people who were making statements about me were the people who didn't deserve to be acknowledged. never mind me

Worrying about what they thought.
The weeks holiday gave me ^{about 2} plenty
of time to take a look at my
self → which was good because I
needed it!! I knew I had problems
like any other teenager did
but I also knew if I was going
to succeed in my exams I needed
to put them aside for the next
few weeks I had left and aim
for the top

Today I went in the form room
being positive, I knew heads
turned as I walked in but I
decided not to let it bother me.
yes, but it did not on the
outside - but on the inside it
did, everybody likes to be
liked and ~~even~~ if your not,
it does hurt even if you
dont want it too.

3
thats human nature.

The next thing which happened was that stupid rumours started being spread around the year about me how pathetic can people get? Ive only been back at school one day and people start acting 1st years - I really cant wait till May 1st. At dinner I was on reception with Sally, we both really enjoy lunch cos we can talk and get off our chests everything about the day. Since we've become christians we can both relate to each other more and it feels really good to have someone who is close to you and shares your faith.

☺
Dinnertimes i enjoy as we
can give god our problems
and burdens and then relax
and get a grip on the
rest of the day

Tuesday 20th April

My really close friend was really upset today. I feel a lot of the same that I want my friends to share their problems with me, so that they feel they're not alone - but I'm a born worrier and three problems I take on board with my own.

I really worry for her, as she makes her feelings too much, in the total opposite I'm mine out to much. I said that I'd go out with her for a drink tonight so she can talk with me. She's started smoking and she says it's really good for her as it relaxes her but it doesn't.

I think is awful - maybe its
her way of getting shut of
her problems like mine is my
faith in Jesus. Im so scared
for her.

I have enough problems of
my own at present, all my
friends are really worried
about exams, but for some
reason im really relaxed
suppose I know we had an
even balance of studying
throughout the last 2 years
at school and perhaps thats
payed off. Today I found out
that I achieved 96% in
my Humanities coursework
so in my GCSE's im
expected a good grade A -
I suppose thats given me

confidence

7

I had to talk to

tonight about

its really getting me down

ive fallen for him - its not a

short girl crush at all, we

never felt like this before, the

time we spend together is

always really natural - i dont

have to pretend when im

with him i dont have to be

anything im not Today we

arranged a game of Squash

for Friday - Sally guessed

there was something going off

and i didn't know what to

say i feel i cant say any-

thing as i dont want any-

thing to get out.

what is really getting to me

today is that i dont know

how he feels about me - am i

5

just a schoolgirl to him or am
I something else

its hard when people fail for
people in any ordinary case
but when its a teacher its
even harder.

I don't know what to do - I
really hate him sometimes
for doing this to me

April 21st

2

This morning as I didn't have
no lessons I went with my
parents permission to the
family planning clinic with

she thinks
she's pregnant, she regrets
everything and keeps saying
how sorry she is but I have
no sympathy for her - I feel
really bad that I don't - as I'm
her best friend but I just don't
she's thought she was before
and that time I was scared
for her - hrs becoming a joke.
My problems seem small
compared to everybody else's
I suppose thier as big as
we make them.

5
April 22nd

I stayed at home this morning
and revised my French
scouts - French - am really
worried about as I want to
do well - my aim in life is
to be an interpreter or a
job dealing with foreign people
& languages in the EEC
~~and~~ I know my G.C.S.E.'s are
the scout of the mountain I'm
going to have to climb.
Got to school about 12.00pm.
Went on Sunbed at 12.30pm.
I find it's great - if I look
good - I feel good so I don't
mind spending money on
myself.

April 23rd

I got up early this morning to make myself look good and I a piece or what I've started really worrying about my looks and I don't know why well do - to make an impression on a certain male I was really looking forward to tonight all day, I was so excited that I was having some time alone with him. I wanted to tell everybody and I knew I couldn't. It's so natural I think, when you care for somebody and you can't show it.

I met him at 3.40pm in the Sportscentre → he beat me off course.

2

we chatted all 7pm and then
we went for a drink at the
pub I got home about 10pm.
Tonight he kissed me, I think
I finally know how he feels
I feel a huge weight's been
lifted off my shoulders.

Saturday 24th April

15

Today I went out with
and
We all went out shopping
we got to spend time with
~~your~~ your friends

Sunday 25th April

Today I took a break from
studying I think I've got myself
into a sweat about my French
& Maths exams. I'm petrified
or scared I'll mess up my
estimated grades. I'm expected
a grade A in Maths and I'm
worried I won't get it.
I went walking with my mum &
and today in the peak district.

14

More things so relaxing
it was Barismal day today
and Sally was being baptised
(AT CHURCH IN EVENING) Mr
and Mrs were there

was so upset I & really wanted
to be baptised but I decided
not because my parents didn't
want me to. I love my parents
so much and respect them
too much I didn't want to
go against their will.

Mr. and I prayed about
it - I feel that Praying relaxes
me

20th Monday April

I been thinking that actually writing this stress diary is stressful because im having to go through events of each day which have upset me. in other ways its good because im getting everything of my chest.

Tonight I went to Happivale (MENCAP) where I work as a volunteer Helper

Its lovely to work with people who have so much love to give you its so special - but when they my and say and do things which would come natural to me it upsets me, because we take for granted things... which they would never be able to do

27th Tuesday April

I had an argument with _____, why does everybody stick their noses into my business.

asked me if I was
going out with anyone, I said
no and she said I saw you
kissing someone - she didn't
she knew I was playing
squash but she didn't know
anything else

I told him I would and he said
ignore them - how can I when
his job is at stake and my
education is. I told him I'd
have to stop seeing him - it
didn't go down too well
I don't know what to do
He's constantly on my mind

17
and although I don't want
to lose him - I don't want
to take any risks.

I told my dad tonight I need-
ed to tell somebody and as
im a (daddys little girl)
I told him

He really understood - I feel
a lot better.

~~He~~ Dad said "It wasn't
very pro of him but you
cant help who you ~~for~~ Fall
in Love with"

3

LXVIII

Thursday 29th April

I had my last extra French class today before the start of the exams. I'm terrified. My ex boyfriend had a car accident today - he was like a best friend to me and because his parents are both from Jamaica and they was at uni in Birmingham - I went with them as they didn't know their way. He brought back memories seeing him I used to share all my problems with him.

April 30th Friday

I've decided which college to go to now. I've been accepted by Clarendon, High Peake and Bulborough. I've decided to go to Bulborough and do 4 A levels in French language, English language, Spanish and (Drama or Geography). I'm relieved I finally made the decision.

Stained squashed with Nanny - he bought me the Nanny Krantz tape - I really enjoy being with him, his friendship but it also hurts me because I'm scared for him. I wish he would be scared for himself. Went to Happivale at 7.30pm.

Sunday 1st May

Now only 10 days to go.

Tonight I went to a concert
 "David White" he's a Christian
 - was ace - I know when I
 have problems I only need to
 ask God for guidance

Sunday 2nd May

My aunty Dawn & her busy
 Joelle came for lunch
 today Dawn's like a sister to
 me, as she lived with me,
 mum and dad whilst she
 was pregnant.
 We all went into Nottingham-
 shire walking.

22

at night I went to church and
then went out with all the
youth

Monday 31st May

23

Art exams prep work is
finally over - stressful or
what? That exam is going
to be rock solid

Got home today and scooped
my heart out it was awful
I didn't do hardly any-
thing

Mum & dad gave me a talk
and told me to just do
my best and they'll be
proud of me.

Tuesday 4th May

IT

Exam over went ace im so happy
I prayed about it I asked
God to give me strength -
mum prayed with me
and the words mum & dad
said to me all came in
my heart.

Im dead proud of my work
wow - I can't believe its
over.

I went out tonight with

and
celebrate it was good

wednesday 5th May

25

Started having problems with
some girls today when they
found out we done some
modeling - can't they grow up?

Thursday 6 May

26

Gay came out of hospital today - I'm glad he's okay. Jay and I both had a mass cry at lunchtime about our feelings over Lads - we both don't know what to do about relationships. I didn't want to pray today - everything was going wrong at school and in 1 way I thought God had betrayed me.

Friday 7 May

It seems dead weird that was
my last Friday - I'm going to
miss some people and others
not.

I really have enjoyed the
5th year in some ways.

I ~~do~~ know ~~more~~^{no} more upset
at school.

It feels really strange - but I
do know I haven't finished
till June 21st.

These writings are all either extracts or complete accounts written by pupils at the school during the period of the research. All were obtained anonymously but with permission to reproduce them in this research.

'In my 4th. and 5th. Year I have felt stressed. I have felt under pressure from many teachers who wanted their homework they set to be in on the deadline. Unfortunately, I have other homework from others teachers; sometimes I feel that maybe some teachers don't realise this, and are only bothered about their homework. I can get so much homework there's not enough hours in the day to do it all. This is when I spend my whole day worrying whether I will finish my homework that night, and when I don't and it becomes a back log for the next day, I become stressed.'

'Sometimes, just thinking about the amount of work in prospect when we've already done 8 hours of school is depressing.'

'I have felt stress at school especially last year. The amount of coursework from subjects was quite time consuming and as well as doing homework for other subjects, I felt I could not cope sometimes with the pressure. I sometimes get stressed because I worry too much about doing things right, instead of just doing things my way. I often think I have done something wrong. So I rip it up and then have to find the time to do it again.'

'I do feel stressed at school mainly because of coursework. Particularly last year as everything came at the same time: Maths, Humanities, Technology, English. It felt as if the teachers weren't talking to each other and they didn't seem sympathetic, often if they were they were patronising. Also they all wanted their subject done first. There were no breaks. Arrgh!'

'I walked home from school to find out that we were going to visit some relatives. My parents wanted me to go with them but I had a lot of homework and I wanted to go out that evening. So I tried to compromise and I said I would go next week but they wouldn't listen so I had to go to my relatives, then rush my homework. So I got into bed late and I was late for school the next morning, so I was quite stressed.'

'I was surrounded by this girl and her friends. I was pushed around and hit but mainly it was verbal. I couldn't do anything apart from stand there because there was 10 to 15 of them. I just pretended I didn't care and ignored them.'

'Stress to me is feeling pressure from either school or other people. To be made upset or angry from pressure. I have felt stress at school. This was when I was in the Lower School and some of my friends broke friends with me. This made me upset and stressed. Also this year, while I have been revising for my mock exams, I had three exams quite close and I was under a lot of pressure to get all my revising done. I also had pressure from members of staff to complete other homework in other subjects.'

'I have felt stressed at school due to peer pressure, deadlines for work to be in etc. It all catches up with me at home and I feel like I could wreck and destroy everything in the house. Most of this happened in the 2nd. and 3rd. Year due to not fitting in with everyone. I just used to dread coming to school, this made me unhappy at home.'

'In the First Year I got stressed about my female geography teacher. I had a very high voice and used to use it to make silly noises. This annoyed the teacher who hit me across the back of my head. I did not like this so decided to get my revenge. Now this teacher had a model boat that she treasured. When we were studying building materials I 'accidentally' dropped a brick on her boat!'

'I was in Technology and the member of staff was showing us how to use the computer. The male member of staff went on to help all the other people, so I waited until he had finished to ask him for help. He went on to start and said I was thick and kept shouting at me for the rest of the lesson.'

'Yes, I have felt stress at school. Basically because I had a serious case of lack of self-motivation which led to numerous ticking offs from teachers and led to me being totally disillusioned with school in general.'

'Once in English Mrs. P was away and we had a supply teacher. Someone was talking about my hair and then this female teacher came up to me and said, "yes, it's extremely greasy. Why don't you wash it?" That got me really annoyed but I kept it my temper down, else I would have shouted abuse at her.'

'I feel stress in English lessons because of the heat and not being able to work because of K.H. (another pupil) , constantly being on edge ready for a stream of abuse or an unexpected hit to the ribs or kidneys. His sprawling elbows don't help either.'

'It was just before Christmas and a member of staff asked me and a friend to do a service at the local church. We both agreed to take part and we started to rehearse.

As it came nearer to the performance we were still not ready to do it. So this member of staff, (we'll call her A) said that in her free lesson we could rehearse with her. This was fine until we found out that in the lesson we should have had, we were having an exam. We told A and she said it didn't matter. When it came to the rehearsal, my teacher for the lesson I should have had, was not there, so we could not tell her we would not be in the exam.

The following week, (after the performance), the teacher was back. She asked us why we had not done the exam, and we told her. She told us off (but then said she wasn't angry with us), and she was going to follow it up..

I was feeling rather worried and this affected me for the rest of the day.

When I got home I felt awful, I thought I was going to be sick.

The next day, when she asked to see us, I thought I was going to faint, my stomach somersaulted when I walked towards her.

When she said no more would be said about it, I felt like a huge weight had been lifted off my shoulders. In the end everything turned out all right for me, but at the time it was very stressful.'

'When I first went down with M.E. my Tutor was really understanding about it. Then after I had had her a few months, she started trying to push me back to school and make me do more work. Even when I was tired and asked to stop. I'd tell her I was tired and all she'd say was "never mind, some more work will take your mind off it". At this stage, I was really ill and had to have a walking stick to help me stand up. I couldn't even eat anything, the most work I could do was half an hour. Even when they could see I was very ill, they still tried to get me shipped off back to school. My Mum went to see the doctor and he said under no circumstances was I to go back to school, until I had shaken off the illness which could be anything up to 12 months or 7 years or more. But even then they still tried to get me back to school.

The thought of school, put me off for life. My Tutor didn't understand, they were trying to ship me back to school before I was ready. On top of this, my first doctor told me I was putting it on to get attention, even though I had had the blood test to prove I had M.E. It had come out positive and he still didn't believe I was ill. I felt like just coming back to school to get everyone off my back. But the thing they didn't understand, was that the pressure they were putting me under was making me worse!'

'One of the worst experiences I ever had occurred during my third year at school. It was at the time of the exams, which I thought were very important. During one Science exam which I was planning to take for my options, I finished early, I checked my paper, then waited. As I glanced up, so did my teacher, he glared at me and in a very audible voice, asked me to wait behind. Not knowing what I had done wrong, I became increasingly agitated. At the end of the exam I went up to him and he accused me of cheating, of talking. I couldn't believe it, he told me I would be given no marks and would have a letter sent to my parents. No matter how I protested, he remained adamant. I left in a state. I was terrified of my parents' reaction and of the consequences if I could not make the teacher believe me, who would? At home I cried but could not bring myself to tell my parents, I felt so ashamed, as if I was guilty. I lost confidence and dreaded every morning waiting for the letter. After about a week the letter had not arrived so I went to see the teacher. He told me he had decided not to send a letter and was forgetting all about the incident. I was furious. I hated that teacher. He had almost jeopardised my future. I had been falsely accused of cheating and as a direct result of this did not choose Science in my options. Looking back I still do not know how I managed to get through that week. I cannot think of reasons why he chose to accuse me - maybe I caught him on a bad day. But that was still not reason enough to put me through such a traumatic experience.'

'Because I tried hard and didn't mess about I was called a 'creep' by other pupils who messed around a lot, this hurt me a lot as I just wanted to do my best. One year our Science Teacher couldn't keep our class under control at all. Therefore we didn't learn much, which told in the exams. I got upset because I wanted to do well, unlike most of the others. One day the teacher was trying to teach us something which I just couldn't understand. So I told the teacher that I had listened but still couldn't understand and asked if he could explain it to me again. He just replied, "I'm not surprised you can't understand" and walked off, with me still not being able to do the work.'

The following is an extract from an English essay. The pupil was not asked to write about a stressful event as such, they were responding to a quotation from a literature text they were reading at the time. The quotation was: 'When you really dread something, it turns out to be not so bad. It's the unexpectedly awful thing that gets you down.' ('Red Sky in the Morning' Elizabeth Leard). I asked the pupil if I could use this because it illustrates how something which adults perhaps do not consider that important, can be tremendously worrying and stressful for a child.

'It all started one day when I was at home watching the television 'Central News'. The horrible subject came up 'THE MEASLES INJECTION'. It said that there was going to be a big epidemic if inoculations weren't carried out. I started to get VERY, VERY worried. The next day at school all everybody could talk about was the dreaded 'MEASLES INJECTION'. At dinner time we got the letter we had to take home about the 'MEASLES INJECTION'. By this time I was getting really stressed out. Throughout the week I was trying as hard as I could to forget about the dam injection but I couldn't. It just kept popping up. Now it came to double English on Monday. The woman from the office came into our room and I thought 'Oh, no!' You've guessed it - it was time to face up to the 'MEASLES INJECTION'. We walked down to P.E. Everyone was as nervous as me. We queued up waiting to go in and to have it done. (I thought I would go in first, so I could get it over and done with). I sat down, my stomach churning, waiting to face up to agony of the 'MEASLES INJECTION'. The woman looked cold and evil so I started to worry more. Then....I had it! It was over! I couldn't believe it. I didn't feel a thing. So really I did all that

panicking over nothing. So next time I have a needle, I'm not going to panic.'

(Pupil's own emphasis).

The next group of writings are extracts from 'stress diaries' kept by volunteers over a period of time determined by them. They have been reproduced in the pupils' own handwriting and have all been written by females in Year 8, 9, 10 and 11. (The order in which they appear in this appendix). The typed diary which follows the hand written ones, was written by a male pupil in Year 11.

29.3.93

Got Mr. R really mad today. I walked into his lesson late (I'd been filling in a form for Mr. C). So Mr. R asked me why I was late. So I told him and went to get my bag. I couldn't find it so after a few seconds of searching I asked Mr. R if he'd seen it. He said, 'how am I meant to know?' I quickly said, 'calm down you might have a heart attack at your age,' and went to leave and he came out with, 'how many other people are going to be late?' So I said, 'how am I meant to know?' and walked to the door. So as per usual he blew his top and shouted across at me, 'You can tell Mr. C not to bother sending in any more people late.' I think that's what he said, but I wasn't particularly bothered. I proceeded out of the door, Mr. R proceeded to throw his chair at his desk in a mild paddy.

*He gets right on my ****. When he first had me in his class he used to be menacing but now he just looks a prat that spouts wind every now and again. He knows that he gets on my nerves and I'll argue back, which I do.*

That particular incident did not cause me stress because he just doesn't affect me!

30.3.93

Had a reasonable day at school. After dinner I decided to go to the toilet to be sick. Well I came back feeling a little better, but under the weather to say the least. So I went to Mr. W to ask for a note to go to the Medical Room before I redecorated everything within a two mile radius. He said, 'no you've got to do some work,' and went on in a most patronising way I didn't like that much. I felt like kicking him right there and shouting 'get stuffed' and other abusive stuff. But I didn't or couldn't. I suppose I could've been sick down him, that would be a classic. Anyway he said write a note and I'll sign it. So I got a piece of paper and wrote 'M feels sick' and amazingly he signed it. So I went home and died.

31.3.93

Went to school this morning to do an exam. Totally bodged it. For some reason I couldn't read what it said. Well I could read it but not take in the information. So I got very frustrated and just wrote something down. Felt ill at break and came to Medical. We had a fire bell. Pity it was only a practise. Came back to medical room, the light buzzed. I don't like it so I switched it off although I could just as easily hit it with a sledge hammer but for two points: 1 - no sledgehammer. 2 - cost allowed to replace it.

20.4.93

Had a mild argument because of work. I've got 1 day to hand in an assignment. The pressure's on.

21.4.93

Managed to get the assignment in but still got an outstanding one. Got to spend all night doing it.

16.4.93

Badminton crap. We were all fine playing games when a supply teacher decides to make up a team, which confused everyone and made people angry. We use P.E. to relax not to get up tighter.

Note - I have found the greatest stress filling in this book and in the colour in the cover of the book!

Mr. R really got on my nerves so I threw a complete barny at him. I was definitely getting stressed 'cause I would not normally say anything. Well stressed and went home!

Mr. R had a long phone call with Dad but he still can't talk to me. I think he wants me to apologise to him. Well it's his fault so he can apologise to me!

Handed all coursework in. I feel a lot better. Now it's just revision. End of school soon.

Yeah, everything is pretty relaxed apart from Maths. Mr. R will not let me sit on the same table as another human!

10.5.93

I want to break free. A lot of fun. I don't feel like doing any work, then again, neither does the 5th Year. Get stressed.

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