School stress and emotional and academic adjustment in Portuguese children: A prospective study with children during a school transition from 4th to 5th grade

Ana I. F. Pereira1,2, José M. P. Canavarro3 Margarida F. Cardoso4 & Denisa Mendonça4

1 Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia, Lisboa, Portugal
2 Escola Superior de Educação de Deus, Lisboa, Portugal
3 Faculdade de Psicologia e de Ciências da Educação, Coimbra, Portugal
4 Instituto de Ciências Biomédicas Abel Salazar – ICBAS, Oporto, Portugal

Introduction

Most Portuguese children undergo a school transition as they move from 4th to 5th grade. This can be considered an "ecological transition" (Maldini, Lombart, Christ & Kalsznel, 2002) due to the multiple changes at different levels. The lack of predictability and increased ambiguity associated with these changes place children at particular risk for school-related stress (Pereira & Mendonça, 2005).

Our main objectives are to analyze the academic and emotional adjustment of Portuguese children during a transition from 4th to 5th grade. To examine the school stress profile of children admitted to school transition from 4th to 5th grade. To analyze the cognitive and emotional adjustment of Portugal children after a school transition from 4th to 5th grade.

Method

Sample

The study sample was composed of 256 Portuguese children (123 girls and 133 boys). The children were of Caucasian origin, from different geographic areas and from different socio-economic status.

Measures

The data were collected using the following tools:

- Teacher and Parent Questionnaires: These questionnaires were used to assess the children’s emotional and social adjustment after school transition.

Results

The results show that school stress from 4th to 5th grade is a significant predictor of academic and emotional adjustment, controlling for the effect of prior adjustment. School stress is an independent predictor of global self-esteem and academic concept. Stress posed in different domains gives different results of school adjustment. Normally, academic stress is a significant predictor of academic performance and academic concept. Teacher-teacher stress is positively associated with emotional and behavior problems evaluated by teachers, and social stress is negatively related to global self-esteem and to behavior problems evaluated by teachers.

Discussion

The longitudinal data relative to academic and emotional adjustment of children before and after a school transition from 4th to 5th grade supports the idea that the children handle successfully with this transition. Also, the positive changes in global self-esteem support the idea that school transition can be a good experience for many children.

In this perspective, school transition poses both challenges and opportunities for students (Alos & Galais, 2006), for example, more freedom and the possibility to make new friends.

After a school transition from 4th to 5th grade children the domain stress is linked to a lower level of academic and emotional adjustment. Children perceive difficulties managing school academic demands in two ways due to their difficulty and because they imply the resolution of ambivalent tasks, when the students must take over-recommendation and organization abilities (Pereira & Mendonça, 2005). The academic stress is also the domain with the most frequent stress items.

However, the higher disturbing events are related to pressure for revision behavior, violence in the classroom, and less learning.

In this perspective, the school transition poses both challenges and opportunities for students (Alos & Galais, 2006). However, the higher disturbing events are low disturbances and relation problems with the teacher. Some academic stress items are not only due to high disturbing events.

Finally, we conjure with other research results on the impact of school stress on children’s self-esteem (Wenz-Gross, Siperstein, Unfr & Widaman, 1997). We found that school stress at the 4th grade predicts significantly academic and emotional adjustment, controlling for the effect of prior adjustment.

The fact that stress was used in different domains effect different indicators of child adjustment points out the importance of considering the varied stress domains in the evaluation and in the development of school stress reduction programs.

References


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