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## **Stress Management Skills for Primary School Children in the South African Curricula**

by

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### **Abstract**

*Given the pervasive phenomenon of teenage suicides and other life-threatening conditions caused by stress, it is advocated that stress management life skills be promoted in primary school and not only when learners enter high school. The South African Life Orientation curriculum is ideally suited to promoting this aim. In the light of the aforesaid, the following questions arise: Does the Life Orientation curriculum in South African primary schools (sufficiently) include stress management skills in its curricula? If so, what is specifically included, and if not, what can be done to support this aim? In the light of these questions, the aim of this article is to critically analyse, by means of a qualitative content analysis research method, South Africa's revised National Curriculum Statement to determine whether it provides for the teaching and learning of stress management skills in the primary school. It was found that, although not explicitly mentioned, stress management skills can be advanced through the LO curriculum's Learning Outcomes and Assessment Standards.*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

High levels of stress have been cited as contributing to teenage suicides in South Africa (SA). Suicide has been cited as being the third biggest killer of young people and is the fastest growing cause of unnatural death of 15- to 24-year-olds in SA. Calls have been made for the stress management to be included in life skills programmes at school (Keeton 2007:5) to combat teen suicides, especially in high schools.

Stress, in its negative form, has been cited as a factor that contributes to several life-threatening diseases as well as a number of other health ailments. De Gois (in Bennet, 2003:1) notes that "[m]ost illnesses, including flu are stress-related or stress-induced". With stress being both universal and pervasive (Lewis, 2003:1), its influence can be life-threatening, especially in its negative form. The common perception that stress is a condition affecting adults is unfounded, since it has been shown to be a universal phenomenon (Koehler 1987:23; Lewis 2003:1) prevalent in children, adolescents and adults. Today's children are especially predisposed to stress (e.g. through crime and abuse, illness, broken homes and educational

challenges). Adults are often inclined to think that children's lives are carefree and untroubled, but they forget that children form part of a holistic system both within the micro-community of the home and the macro-community of the broader society, where stress and stressors are pervasive.

There is a difference between the way adults and children experience stress, due to amongst others, developmental and perceptual differences and therefore measures should be taken to address the needs of this specific grouping (Lewis 2003:2). Kruger (1992:245) amplifies this point of view when she highlights the significance of stress management in the pre-school and primary school years. Koehler (1987:23) emphasises that children are indeed subjected to stress and therefore need support:

Stress management is no longer for adults. More and more we are seeing young children suffering from the effects of stress. They, too, become anxious or upset and are susceptible to such stress responses as muscle tension, bed-wetting, upset stomach, and headaches.

Stress management involves using various skills and strategies which may be used to help people control their response to stressful events (Woodbridge 1998:50). It is therefore imperative to understand childhood stress and manage it effectively and holistically, and to include the education system in dealing with this challenge.

In the past, childhood stress did not attract much research attention, but there has recently been much interest in this problem, especially in the USA and the UK (Lewis 2003:117). This author notes a void in the body of knowledge, especially within the South African context, with regard to understanding the way children experience stress and effective ways in managing it holistically. Referring to the shift to outcomes-based education and its relevance to the South African context, Lewis (2003:4) states that

[m]ore emphasis has now been placed on the holistic development of children within a rapidly changing and transforming society, both nationally and internationally. The acquisition of problem-solving life skills as part of the educative process has been acknowledged and propagated in the Revised Curriculum 2005 and in so doing, recognition is given to the need to learn and manage stress.

While one cannot emphasise enough the importance of assisting teenagers to develop skills in dealing with stress and stressors, it must be realised that this matter cannot be dealt with only once a child reaches the teens. It has to be addressed in all aspects of the curricula as the transfer of stress management skills from childhood to teenage years may prove inadequate and problematic.

The national curriculum aims to create independent lifelong learners who are literate, numerate, multi-skilled, compassionate, and considerate of the environment as well as critical and respectful citizens (Department of Education 2003:8). Several Learning Areas (LAs) and critical outcomes are involved, such as problem solving and group work (Department of Education, 2003:11). These are aspects of life skills that employ and embrace stress management skills in negotiating life's demands. As

Strydom (2005:97) notes: "There is no question about the necessity of acquiring life skills to cope with the demands of life." She further argues that although life skills feature within the LO Learning Area, the outcomes can also be addressed in other LAs as well. It is generally included in the LO Learning Area because LO is compulsory. This shows how much value is attributed to learners being exposed to life skills programmes (Strydom 2005:98). Jansen (2005:vii) supports the view that life skills should be included in the curricula so that South Africa's youth may have knowledge, live together and "learn to be".

The question arises: Where, within the primary school Life Orientation (LO) curriculum, are stress management skills addressed, and if they are not, where can they be included? According to the Revised National Curriculum Statement, LO is one of the eight Learning Areas (LAs). Since it aims to guide and prepare learners for life within a fast changing and transforming society (Department of Education 2003:26), its applicability and importance are noted.

The aim of this article is to establish the extent to which the Life Orientation (LO) Learning Area (LA) includes stress management skills within the primary school curriculum. The research was conducted by means of a literature study that served as the foundation for an inductive qualitative content analysis of the Life Orientation document (Department of Education 2002) of the Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9 (Schools). This document was selected because it is the official LO curriculum statement for the primary school phase adhered to by government schools in South Africa.

Besides making a case for the inclusion of stress management skills in the primary school curriculum, it was hoped to come to some conclusion/s in order to contribute to educational practice in South Africa and possibly internationally. Stress is both a specific and a universal phenomenon and this could possibly have benefits for children in other contexts, other than South Africa.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL THEORIES

### 2.1 Childhood stress

The term 'child' generally refers to the phase between infancy and puberty (Reber 1985, Sv 'child'). However, this phase is considered very broad as it encompasses numerous other sub-phases (i.e. the infant, toddler, pre-school child, and middle years of childhood as well as pre-adolescence) (cf Stone & Church 1979). In this article, the focus will be on the child in its middle years of childhood (M-C phase) covering the ages ± 7-11 as this phase encompasses a large part of the primary school phase in South African schools.

The concept 'stress', according to the *Heinemann English Dictionary* (Harber & Payton 1979 Sv 'stress') is derived from the Latin *strictus* meaning 'tightened'. Although 'stress' has numerous meanings in various contexts, a particular application relevant to this research refers to 'emotional or intellectual pressure or tension', in other words, emotional or intellectual 'tightening'. However, this tightening also applies to the physical, conative, religious, moral and social modalities in humans, and necessitates a holistic and systemic understanding.

Several theories exist regarding the phenomenon of stress. The three most commonly used will be briefly discussed: the General Adaptation Syndrome, the Life Change Model and the Transaction Model.

#### 2.1.1 The General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS)

The Austrian-born physician and endocrinologist, Hans Selye, proposed the three-stage GAS model in an attempt to explain the body's physical reaction to biological stressors. Selye (1976:64) defines stress operationally as "the state manifested by a specific syndrome which consists of all the nonspecifically-induced changes within a biologic system".

Selye, who observed that stress becomes dangerous when it is abnormally prolonged, occurs too frequently and focuses on one particular organ of the body, states that "*essentially [stress is] reflected by the rate of all the wear and tear caused by life*" (Selye 1976:xvi). In essence, Selye claims that each demand on the body is unique in that there is a specific physical response: when we are cold, we shiver; when we are hot, we perspire; an immense muscular activity elevates the demands upon the heart and vascular system. Selye observes that stress becomes dangerous when it is abnormally prolonged, occurs too frequently and focuses on one particular organ of the body (Woodbridge 1998:48).

#### 2.1.2 The Life Change Model (LCM)

The Life Change Model (LCM) of Holmes and Rahe (1967) explains stress as being the result of the changes in a person's life. Major external events are not necessarily precursors to stress and the LCM therefore explains stress as being the result of the changes in a person's life, large or small, wanted or unwanted. The collection of small changes can thus be as powerful as the cumulative effect of one major stressor. Holmes and Rahe (1967:213-218) devised the Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS) to measure the impact of life changes. Numerous events were rated in terms of the amount of readjustment necessary. For each life event, these researchers ascribed a numerical value that related to its intensity as a stressor. These "stress potential" values are referred to as "life change units" (LCU). The maximum value was ascribed to the death of a spouse (100) while the minimum value of 11 was ascribed to minor violations of the law (Patel 1988:31-32). These researchers found that 93% of health problems affected patients who, during the previous year, had been exposed to LCUs whose values totalled 150 or more.

#### 2.1.3 The Transaction Model (TM)

According to this theory, developed by Richard Lazarus (1969), an understanding of a person's interpretation of a stressful event or life changes is what is significant. In his work entitled *Psychological Stress and the Coping Process* (1969), Lazarus formulated the TM theory in that stress resides neither in the person, nor the situation alone, but in a transaction between the two. The stress

process is, therefore, viewed as an active cognitive state that continually changes as a result of the constant interaction between the individual and the environment. According to this model, an understanding of a person's perception or interpretation of a stressful event is significant, a concept Noshpitz (1990:55) refers to as "*perceptual-experiential*". Stress will therefore be perceived differently by people of different cultures, social settings, genders and ages and a child's experience will be totally different from how an adult experiences something, yet also, two children will not experience something similarly (Sue *et al.* 1997:195; Lewis 2003).

Childhood stress models are generally developed from these three main models and are used either singularly or collectively by childhood stress theorists. Although the use of general models of stress is useful in the broad understanding of stress, they do not underscore the phenomenon of childhood stress specifically. Several models developed by researchers that pertain specifically to stress in children, especially those in the M-C phase, reflect a need to address and understand the phenomenon from a specific point of view and developmental level, and although hinging on these general stress theories, childhood stress has shown its own distinctive characteristics (Lewis 2003:109).

### 3. LIFE SKILLS

Life Skills (LS) forms one of the eight Learning Areas (LA) of the South African Outcomes-based education (OBE) curriculum as stated by the Revised National Curriculum Statement, namely Life Orientation (LO) and aims to guide and prepare learners for life and its possibilities. In other words, it aims to equip learners to cope holistically for significant living in a transforming society (Department of Education 2002; Department of Education 2003:19).

In the Life Orientation document of the Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9 (Schools), five core areas have been identified for LO: health promotion, social development, personal development, physical development and movement and orientation to the world of work. The Foundation (Grades 1-3) and Intermediate Phases (Grades 4-6) cover the first four areas, while the Senior Phase (Grades 7-12) includes the fifth one. This document also specifies Assessment Standards (ASs) which enables the Learning Outcomes to be achieved. ASs describe the extent (depth and breadth) of what learners should know and be able to do, they also illustrate how conceptual and skills development can take place over time and are integrated within and across grades (Department of Education 2002:2-7; Department of Education 2003:19).

As the focus of this research is on the former two phases (Foundation and Intermediate Phases), the first four Learning Outcomes will be the focus (Department of Education 2003:20):

- Learning Outcome 1 – Health promotion: The learner is able to construct informed decisions concerning personal, community and environmental health.

- Learning Outcome 2 – Social development: The learner is able to demonstrate an understanding of and dedication to constitutional rights and responsibilities and shows an understanding of varied cultures and religions.
- Learning Outcome 3 – Personal development: The learner is able to use acquired life skills to attain and broaden personal potential to respond in effect to challenges in his/her world.
- Learning Outcome 4 – Physical development and movement: The learner is able to demonstrate an understanding of and take part in activities that support movement and physical development.

Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2006:27) note the links that the abovementioned outcomes form and correspond with other countries' definition of LO which also promote a holistic human development and the promotion of school-community collaboration.

#### 4. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

The method of research selected for this article was a qualitative content analysis as it aimed to establish the extent to which stress management skills are accommodated in the LO curricula at primary school level, especially during the foundation and intermediate phases. This method interprets meaning from the content of text data and, hence adheres to the naturalistic paradigm (Hsieh, 2005). Merriam's (1997:160) view is that "all qualitative data analysis is content analysis in that it is the *content* of interviews, field notes, and documents that is analyzed". In content analysis, the interpretation of patterns as well as the context in text analysis is of importance, the latter acknowledging the naturalistic paradigm.

The ultimate goal of this qualitative content analysis was to establish the extent to which the document allowed learners to develop stress management skills via the LO Learning Area. In order to achieve the ultimate aim, a hermeneutical investigation was conducted in the form of a content analysis of the Life Orientation document of the Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9 (Schools) (Department of Education 2002).

The steps taken in performing a qualitative content analysis are those identified by Mayring (2000) and are adapted for hermeneutical qualitative analysis as opposed to a quantitative analysis. Hermeneutics offers a perspective for interpreting texts and provides a framework for interpretive understanding with an emphasis on context and the original purpose (Patton 2002:114) thereby acknowledging the naturalistic paradigm. Firstly, the research problem was established. Secondly, categories were defined and inductive categories established. Thirdly, the step-by-step formulation of inductive categories based on the literature was undertaken. Step four involved revising the categories after 10-50% of the content had been analysed. In the fifth stage, the final analysis of the text was performed, whilst lastly, the results were interpreted qualitatively as opposed to any quantitative steps (frequencies) of analysis.

The research problem was defined and the necessary phenomenon was conceptually described, in this instance stress and life skills. The universe of appropriate media was also demarcated: specific LO documents, in this instance, official national primary school LO curricula documents, were analysed from a hermeneutical perspective. The initial categories were based on the LO Learning Outcomes for the core areas of LO (Department of Education 2002; Department of Education 2003:20); Learning Outcome 1 – Health promotion; Learning Outcome 2 – Social development; Learning Outcome 3 – Personal development and Learning Outcome 4 – Physical development and movement (see LO outcomes in section 4) and were maintained in the final text analysis. A colleague, schooled in LO, analysed the text and subjected the researcher's interpretation to a critical analysis. This ensured reliability. Agreement was reached with this colleague before the ultimate analysis was attempted. From there the final data analysis was analysed and several conclusions and recommendations proposed.

#### 5. DISCUSSION OF DATA

An important aspect of the OBE curricula is that of integration and, although the data is handled separately in the foregoing discussion, it is important to bear in mind that they should be integrated in practice (Strydom 2005:98). While the Life Orientation policy document (Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9 [Schools]) of the Department of Education (2002) serves as a framework for educators as they construct knowledge within their particular context, a critique of this text is essential for educators to gain a specific understanding of this document's application to stress management skills for primary school children.

##### 5.1 Health promotion

The first outcome envisages that the learner is able to make informed decisions concerning personal, community and environmental health and goes on to note that "aspects to be addressed include nutrition, diseases including HIV/AIDS and STDs, safety, violence, abuse and environmental health" (Department of Education 2002; 2003:20).

While there is no mention of any specific stress-related concept within this first outcome and its explanation, it is implied in the concept 'health promotion'. Health promotion does not mean only the promotion of physical health – albeit important – but rather refers to a more holistic approach, which, according to Donald *et al.* (2006:8), refers to "encouraging physical, cognitive, social, emotional, moral and spiritual well-being in supportive environments". Myers, Sweeney and Witmer (2000:252) refer to the concept 'wellness', which has a similar meaning: "We define *wellness* as a way of life oriented toward optimal health and well-being in which body, mind, and spirit are integrated by the individual to live more fully within the human and natural community."

Contributing to this wellness is the management of stress. If, for example, the body is under constant stress, healthy growth will be underdeveloped and that

person's very existence will be vulnerable. Most of the person's energy will be aimed at trying to stay alive, which will subsequently impact negatively on his/her other modalities – emotional, spiritual, social and cognitive (Strydom 2005:99), thereby causing further stress from a nutritional point of view. The Grade 1 AS, which identifies healthy choices from a range of commonly available foods and drinks, is a possible way to manage this type of stress. Furthermore, the Grade 3 AS which "compares healthy and poor dietary habits and describes the effects of such habits on personal health" furthermore advances this previous Grade's AS (Department of Education 2002:17).

This outcome furthermore acknowledges the importance of health promotion within the South African context from a holistic point of view, specifically relating to several health issues which can cause stress within the primary school child. This outcome recognises the bio-ecosystemic viewpoint of the individual, the community and the environment and possible aspects that can cause a child stress, for example a child's parents dying of AIDS and the negative impact that this can have on a child. Furthermore, stressors unique to South Africa have a distinct impact on its populace and will thus be perceived and acted upon differently. The AS for Grade 7, for example, proposes that educators describe strategies for living with diseases, including HIV/AIDS (Department of Education 2002:40). Factors such as the influence of HIV/AIDS, poverty, gender discrimination and violence (Are any other issues covered? Sa:online) impinge directly and indirectly (Gibson 1994:2-6) not only on children's lives but also on the whole spectrum of the South African population from birth till death. An AS that can possibly contribute towards managing the stress involved is similarly situated in the Grade 7 section which "proposes ways to improve the nutritional value of their own personal diet" (Department of Education 2002:40). The resultant stress has a systemic influence about which Prinsloo (2007:155) says, "Disintegrated families, single parenthood and child-headed households cause more stress and greater poverty." The ASs which evaluates actions to tackle environmental health problems addresses the bio-ecosystemic nature of this stress.

A child reflecting developmental delays in one or more of these aspects can furthermore experience stress (Chandler 1985:17). These developmental delays and deficiencies can impact negatively on the child's eventual development and becoming. In this regard, Ebersöhn and Eloff (2006:3) propose asset-focussed life skills facilitation which aims to encourage resiliency by making children aware of the assets and protective factors that may be accessible to them. Mature mentors are furthermore needed to guide children systemically in learning more about themselves and their environments through education, in this instance through the LO learning area in order to manage stress. Vygotsky, among other educational professionals, believes that it is the role of education to provide children with experiences which are in their zones of proximal development ZPD, thereby encouraging and advancing their individual learning. Vygotsky's view is that a child follows an adult's example and gradually develops the ability to do certain tasks without help or assistance. This he called the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Strydom 2005:97).

## 5.2 Social development

This outcome refers to the learner's ability to demonstrate an understanding of and dedication to constitutional rights and responsibilities and to show an understanding of varied cultures and religions. Knowledge, values, skills and attitudes of this outcome include that "issues to be addressed include human rights as contained in the South African constitution, social relationships and diverse cultures and religions" ((Department of Education 2002; 2003:20).

While Learning Outcome 1 encompassed facets of social development as an aspect of health promotion, this specific learning outcome takes it further into the wider meso- and macro-systemic context, an aspect very often ignored, especially from a life-skills facilitation perspective (Durrant & Kowalski 2006:39). Donald et al. (2006:2-3) refer to social *context* as opposed to development and claim that context "covers all aspects of the position that a person occupies in society as a whole, as well as more specific levels of human interaction such as local communities, families and peer groups. This position is defined by the interaction of economic, social, cultural factors at each of these levels." These authors believe that these factors continually change, develop and evolve and invariably cause stress due to the possibility that specific needs are not being met at various social and societal levels. An example of this is racism that is prevalent in the education system. Although racism is outlawed by the South African constitution, it is still prevalent in many South African schools and is an aspect that impacts on social relations. The outcome of racism is possible strained relations which impacts on a micro-, meso- and macro-level, thereby causing stress, even to school-going primary children. The curriculum addresses this problem in several ways: The Grade 1 AS which "explains relationships with members of the family, extended family, school and broader society" (Department of Education 2002:18) contributes to an initial understanding of the dynamics involved in relationships and possible stress involved, possibly due to racism, an aspect addressed in the Grade 4 and 5 ASs linked to this learning outcome (Department of Education 2002:30-31). Pretorius's (1998:29-31) view is that "[f]rom a sociopedagogical point of view the structure and dynamics of society are responsible for many educational problems". Yet Pretorius also recognizes that "[e]ducation also influences society", thereby acknowledging the reciprocal influence of the two systems on one another. It therefore calls for stress management skills to be harnessed, not only from the individual, but also from the whole social system and vice versa.

## 5.3 Personal development

Learning Outcome 3 refers to the learner being able to use acquired life skills to attain and broaden personal potential to respond to challenges in his/her world. It includes life skills development, emotional development, self-concept formation and self-empowerment (Department of Education 2002:6; 2003:20).

Donald *et al.*'s (2006:23) view of life skills, explains this outcome's rationale. These authors consider life skills as being specific attitudes, knowledge, and skills

that allow humans to deal successfully with the challenges of daily life and thus to advance physical, emotional, and social wellness. Life skills increase people's competence, coping resources, and self-confidence. These authors' explanation of life skills encompasses emotional development and implies that its constructive development will enhance self-concept formation and self-empowerment. Furthermore, a number of core life skills that cross social and cultural contexts, identified by the World Health Organization's Division of Mental Health, include skills that promote self-concept formation and self-empowerment: decision making, problem solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, effective communication, interpersonal relating, self-awareness, and the ability to emphasise and to cope with emotions as well as with stress. Although these aspects appear both individually and in isolation, they are closely connected and influence one another. While the latter life skill (i.e. coping with stress) relates specifically to the focus of this article, the other life skills also relate to the phenomenon of stress. For example, the skill of problem solving assists children in coping with stress and stressful situations.

The Grade 1 AS, which promotes coping with anger and disagreement in non-destructive ways, is a means whereby learners can solve the problem of stressful situations. This AS is taken further in Grade 4 where it encourages learners to demonstrate the ability to select and apply useful responses to conflict situations (Department of Education 2002:20,32). Together, these life skills contribute towards the positive personal development of the child which can assist him/her in dealing with stress and stressful situations.

#### 5.4 Physical development and movement

Learning Outcome 4 notes that the learner is able to demonstrate an understanding of and take part in activities that support movement and physical development. It includes perceptual motor development, games and sport, gymnastics, physical growth and development, recreation and play (Department of Education 2002: 22; 2003:20).

Physical development is included in Learning Outcome 1, but has been given a separate emphasis as well in this outcome. However, if one links physical development and movement to Gardner's (Strydom 2005:99) "bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence", several commonalities and explanations exist. Bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence is seen as the capacity to use the body as a tool to deal with daily physical stress resourcefully, and to apply the body in distinctive ways to manipulate it and objects in diverse spatial setups. In dealing with this stress, children can manage by gaining knowledge of the physical self, realising the uniqueness of each body, understanding the need for healthy nutrition and the handling of diseases, taking part in physical activities and developing subsequent skills and the mastery of gross and fine motor skills. This ability in turn develops other specific skills needed in environmental manipulation (Strydom 2005:99).

Physical responses caused by stressors can be addressed in several ways, depending on the individual case. Once the relationship between stressors and physical response has been presented, a discussion and demonstration of how

the child can reduce the physical impact can occur. It would include referral to a medical practitioner; the prescribing of medication; proper nutrition, physical activity and exercise, rest and sleep; proper care and shelter; and somatic relaxation techniques (Lewis 2003:73). The Grade 1 AS encourages children to participate in free play activities using a variety of equipment. This promotes the management of stress by children through taking part in physical activities, a recognised outlet of stress.

#### 6. Conclusions

Several general theories have been put forward to explain the phenomenon of stress. The most frequently cited are the GAS, TM and LCM. What emanated from these models is that stress has two sides, a physical and psychological side; it can be brought on by internal and/or external factors; it is not necessarily always negative; and lastly, the way in which different people experience it depends on their perception or interpretation of these stressors. If stress is understood, it makes it easier to manage it.

The M-C phase indeed differs profoundly from other phases regarding the physical, intellectual, emotional, social and normative aspects. In order for the child in the M-C phase to develop and become, life skills should be developed holistically to cope with challenges that present stress. It was found that the Learning Outcomes do accommodate stress management skills implicitly, but not explicitly. However, although no specific mention was made to stress in the ASs, they did accommodate stress management skills. The next step would be to design a teaching tool to further elucidate those specific aspects of stress and acknowledge links in the ASs of the different grades, and to give practical examples. A follow-up article would contribute towards this end.

Childhood theories of stress developed from these previously mentioned general theories in some form or another with similar general principles. These principles of childhood stress are necessary in understanding a management programme specifically suited to guide children in the M-C phase specifically pertaining to LO. In order for children's stress to be managed efficiently it should take into consideration, the main principles of stress management theories, as well as the child's holistic development and becoming be considered for effective management. Furthermore, a generic approach to stress management in children is not recommended. The developmental phase determines the type of stressor evident in the child and it is therefore imperative that the specific developmental phase that the child is in is taken into consideration when including it within the LO curriculum. These aspects can be taken up by the designers of curricula as well as by educators.

The text analysis yielded certain findings identifying related terms and theories of stress which go towards supporting the inclusion of stress management skills in the current LO curricula for children, mainly those in the Middle Childhood phase of the primary school – generally Grades 1-6.

In the document analysed, no explicit mention was made of stress management skills or related nomenclature. However, the LO outcomes give enough scope for the inclusion thereof in the LO curriculum of Grades 1-6. Although the ASs that are given do not refer to stress management specifically, they do go a long way in recognising stress management principles in general.

As was evident from the text analysis, the four learning outcomes and ASs (cf section 4) provided for the holistic and coherent approach to viewing and managing childhood stress (cf section 3) once a conceptual analysis of those core knowledge and concepts was performed (cf section 6). Links with the ASs of the different grades can be identified in a later article in more detail where childhood stress management skills and practical guidelines are specifically discussed.

What became clear from this textual analysis was several instances of repetition within the learning outcomes of the LO curricula. Health promotion (cf section 6.1), in itself, contained aspects of physical development and movement (cf section 6.4), for example. A recommendation would be to streamline the learning outcomes to include the essential core knowledge of life skills internationally. This recommendation can be the focus of further research before policy makers make any changes to curriculum content.

## 8. CONCLUSION

The research showed that the current LO curriculum provide the space to develop stress management skills for children. This research also indicated to LO teachers how stress management skills feature within this learning programme and how they can generally manifest within each individual teacher's lesson plan. Further research could specify stress management skills suited for each grade, based on children's developmental stages, in order to ensure progression from one grade to the next.

This research serves as a discussion framework from which teachers and facilitators can glean information about the stress phenomenon and how it can be applied in the practice of education. In this way it can equip teachers to assist learners in gaining life skills to deal with stress in their everyday life, thereby contributing towards a decline of teenage suicides in SA, to name but one social concern affecting society and the education system.

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## Stress Levels of Final Year Students at Three Universities of Africa: A Proposal of a Support Programme for Discussion

by

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### Abstract

*The study investigated the stress levels of third year university students in Uganda, South Africa and Cameroon. A biographic questionnaire, the General Health Questionnaire, the Stressor Index and the Stress Index were administered to collect data on socio economic background, symptoms of mental health, stressors involved and the stress levels of students. The results show 33.7% of students seems to have a stress level above average. There is a strong relationship between reported levels of stress and family stressors, work stressors, interpersonal stressors and environmental stressors. The results show a high correlation between the stress levels of students and general health symptoms like anxiety/insomnia, social dysfunction, severe depression and somatic behaviour. From these results a proposal was made as recommendation to support students at universities in Africa with professional career counselling, stress management programmes, programmes on cultural diversity and entrepreneurial skills and sport participation programmes to facilitate psychological wellness.*

### INTRODUCTION

Africa and its people are going through a process of change on various levels. Currently the continent is changing from a war-oriented to a more development and peacemaking cycle especially in countries like Angola, Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Burundi. Regarding cultural influence and change Moosa, Moonsamy and Fridjhon (1997, p3) write that through Western colonialism and imperialism "Africans have internalised western culture", while Mpofu (1999, p4) says "the citizens of Zimbabwe have world views that combine elements of traditional collectivist native African cultures and modern Western individualism". Moosa et al (1997) writes that Western influences on economic, political and cultural levels change the individual consciousness of Africans.

The question is whether the youth of Africa, especially final year students at African universities, is empowered enough or at all through knowledge, skills and with a global vision to develop and maintain a career in this changing environment. Sefotho (2005) regards career counselling as a professional service to facilitate and empower students through personal development, career guidance, and generic skills to plan a curriculum vitae, to prepare for a career interview and to discover the global world of