

## Daily hassles in a population of Romanian adolescents

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**Abstract.** Objective: The present study is aimed to identify the most important long-term stressors for Romanian adolescents. Material and Methods: 1143 randomly selected Romanian subjects were considered. Mean age in the study sample was 15.02, with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.371. About 65.4% of subjects were females. Daily hassles related to the family environment, physical state, psychological status, financial status of the family and interpersonal relationships were covered Results: 22.7% of the subjects reported daily hassles related to their familial environment, 7.8% reported daily hassles related to their physical state, 59.6% reported daily hassles related to their psychological state, 41.9% reported financial difficulties of their families and 4.4% of adolescent reported being bullied. Conclusion: Stressors that appear to be most relevant for adolescents in north-western Romania are: financial difficulties of the family and psychological difficulties. There are no differences in reporting bullying between genders and that this phenomenon is less frequent in Romania. A greater attention should be paid to the effects of workforce migration.

**Key Words:** stress, daily hassles, adolescents.

**Rezumat.** Obiectiv: Studiul de față are ca scop identificarea celor mai importanți stresori cu durată lungă de acțiune pentru adolescenții români. Material și metodă: 1143 de subiecți români au fost incluși în studiu. Vârsta medie a subiecților a fost de 15,2 ani, cu o deviație standard de 0,371. Aproximativ 65,4% dintre subiecți au fost de sex feminin. Stresorii luați în calcul au fost stresori cu durată lungă de acțiune, legați de mediul familial, starea fizică, starea psihică, starea materială a familiei și relațiile interpersonale. Rezultate: 22,7% dintre subiecți au raportat prezența unor stresori cotidiani legați de mediul familial, 7,8% au raportat prezența unor stresori cotidiani legați de starea fizică, 59,6% au raportat prezența unor stresori cotidiani legați de starea psihică, 41,9% au raportat prezența unor stresori cotidiani legați de starea materială a familiei și 4,4% au declarat că sunt victime ale intimidării. Concluzii: Stresorii cotidiani cu cea mai mare relevanță pentru adolescenții din nord-vestul României sunt cei legați de starea materială a familiei și cei de natură psihologică. Nu există diferențe semnificative între sexe în ceea ce privește intimidarea și acest fenomen este mai puțin frecvent în România, decât în alte țări. O mai mare atenție ar trebui să fie acordată consecințelor migrației forței de muncă.

**Cuvinte cheie:** stres, stresori cotidiani, adolescenți.

**Introduction.** There is sufficient empirical evidence to prove that stress plays a major role in etiopathogenesis of several psychiatric disorders: depressive episodes, anxiety disorders, etc. (Stiller et al 2011), i.e. after a severe stressor, the risk for a person to develop a depressive episode increases to 17-31% (Kim & Jacobs 1995), and relative risk varies between 3 and 10 after exposure to negative life events (Ormel 1999). Furthermore, chronic stress has been proven to be a better predictor for depression than acute stress (Brown 1978, McGonagle 1990) and adults describe long-term adverse situations as being more stressful than acute events (van Praag 2005).

Adolescence, with its biological and psychological changes, is one of the most vulnerable periods in life. Thus, strategies aimed to prevent psychiatric disorders should be developed keeping the particularities of this period in mind, including stressors.

**Aim.** The present study is aimed to identify the most important long-term stressors for Romanian adolescents.

**Material and Methods.** The current study is part of the SEYLE project. The SEYLE project is funded by the European Commission through the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Program. The study protocol has been published elsewhere (Wasserman et al 2010).

For the present study, 1143 randomly selected Romanian subjects were considered. Mean age in the study sample was 15.02, with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.371. About 65.4% of subjects were females.

The data on daily hassles has been collected through the SEYLE baseline questionnaire. Stressors related to the family environment, physical state, psychological status, financial status of the family and interpersonal relationships were covered. Daily hassles related to the psychological status were assessed by asking the adolescents if they believe they have emotional, concentration behavioral or relational difficulties that upset or distress them and/or interfere with life at home, friendships, classroom learning or leisure activities. Also, the adolescents were asked how often they feel stressed (tense, restless, nervous, worried, etc.). Individual stressors covered are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Daily hassles taken into consideration

<i>No</i>	<i>Type</i>
	Stressors related to the family environment
1	Single parent
2	Foster parent or parent partner
3	Parent working abroad
4	Foster care
	Stressors related to the physical state
5	Physical disability
6	Chronic illness
	Stressors related to the psychological status
7	Difficulties that upset or distress the subject
8	Difficulties that interfere with life at home
9	Difficulties that interfere with friendships
10	Difficulties that interfere with classroom learning
11	Difficulties that interfere with leisure activities
12	Feels stressed (tense, restless, nervous, worried etc.)
	Stressors related to the financial status of the family
13	Parent unemployment
14	Parents have problems making ends meet
	Stressors related to interpersonal relationships
15	Bullying

The statistical analysis was performed using the Statistical Pack for Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 15.0. The Pearson Chi-Square Test or Fisher's Exact Test were used to identify gender differences, accordingly.

**Results.** The percentages of subjects reporting daily hassles related to the family environment are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Proportion of subjects reporting daily hassles related to the family environment

<i>No.</i>	<i>Stressor</i>	<i>%</i>
1	Parent working abroad	12.7
2	Single parent	9.0
3	Foster parent or parent partner	3.5
4	Foster care	0.3

Approximately 2.1% of the subjects reported having a physical disability, and 6.7% of them reported suffering from a chronic illness.

About 53.37% of the adolescents reported having emotional, concentration, behavioral or relational difficulties, but only 74.42% of these reported that these difficulties upset or distress them (see Figure 1).

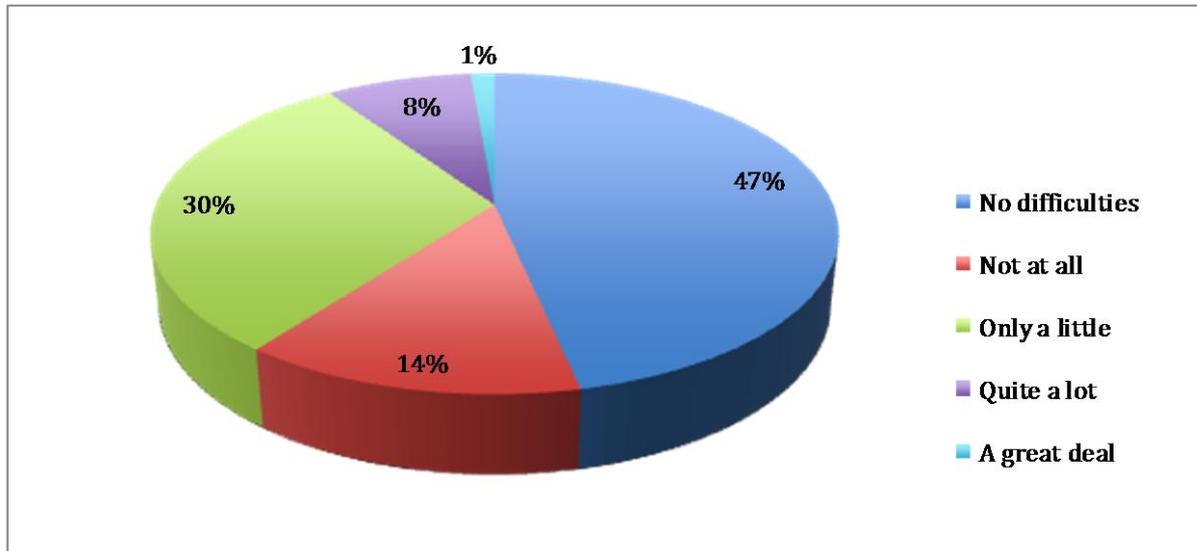


Figure 1. Emotional, concentration, behavioral or relational difficulties that upset or distress adolescents

Furthermore, the domains of functioning most impaired by these difficulties, in adolescents' opinion are classroom learning and friendships (see Figure 2).

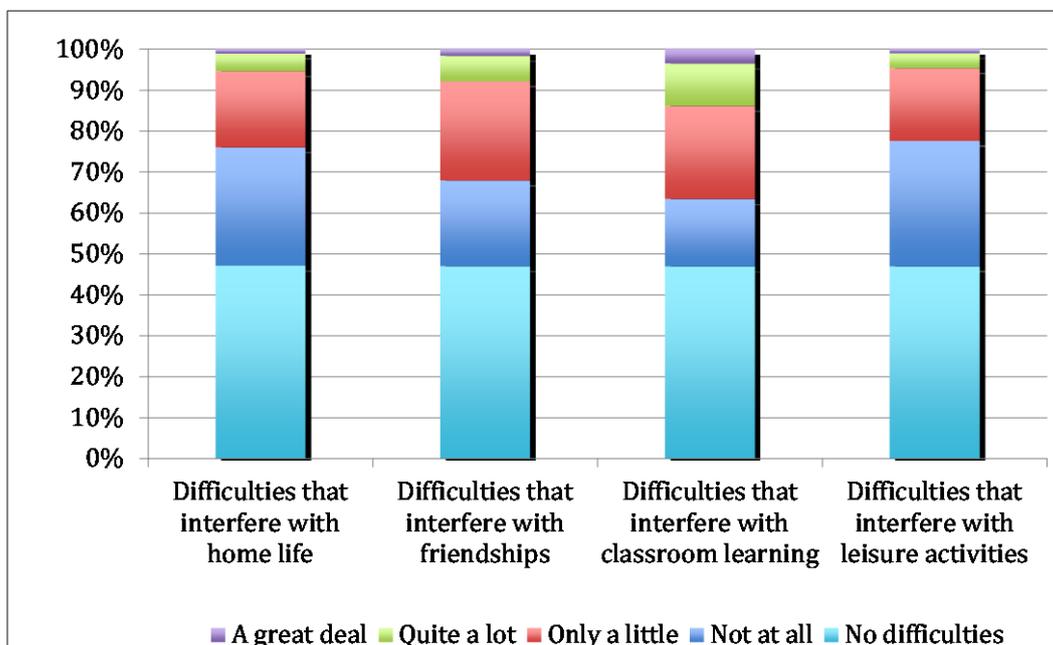


Figure 2. The degree of impairment caused by the emotional, concentration, behavioral or relational difficulties in various domains of functioning

The perception of stress, reported by the adolescents is presented in Figure 3.

Regarding daily hassles related to the financial status of the family, 10.9% of adolescents report that their mother or father lost their jobs during the past year. The answers regarding parents having problems making ends meet are shown in Figure 4.

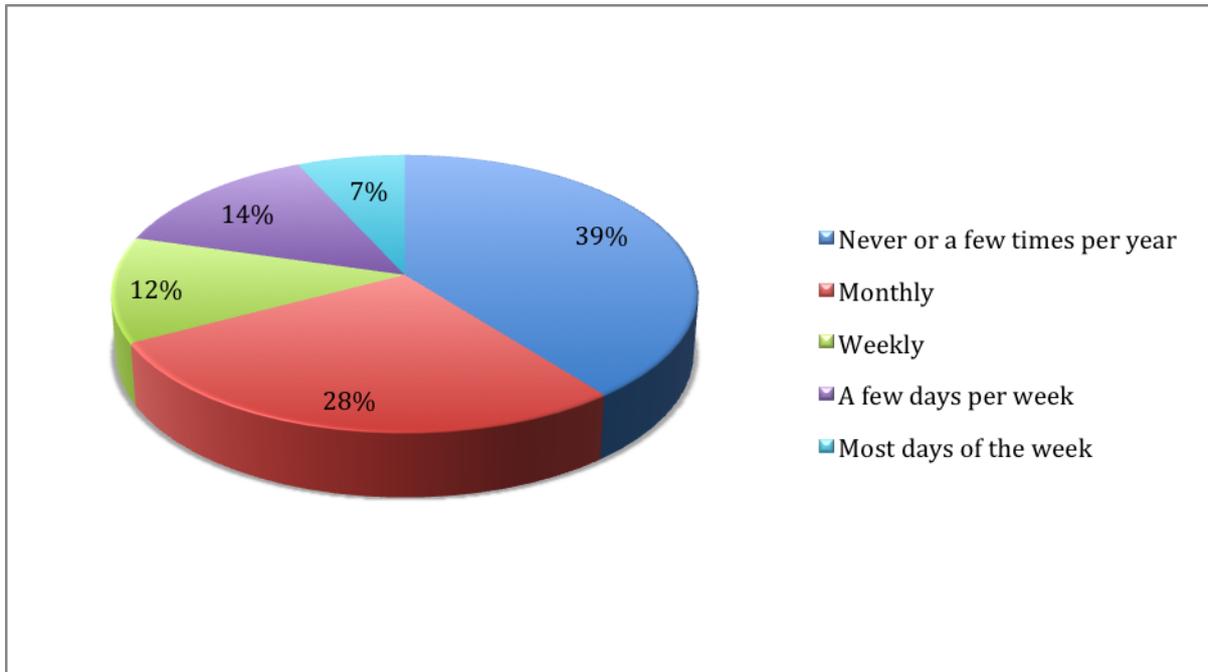


Figure 3. The perception of stress reported by the adolescents

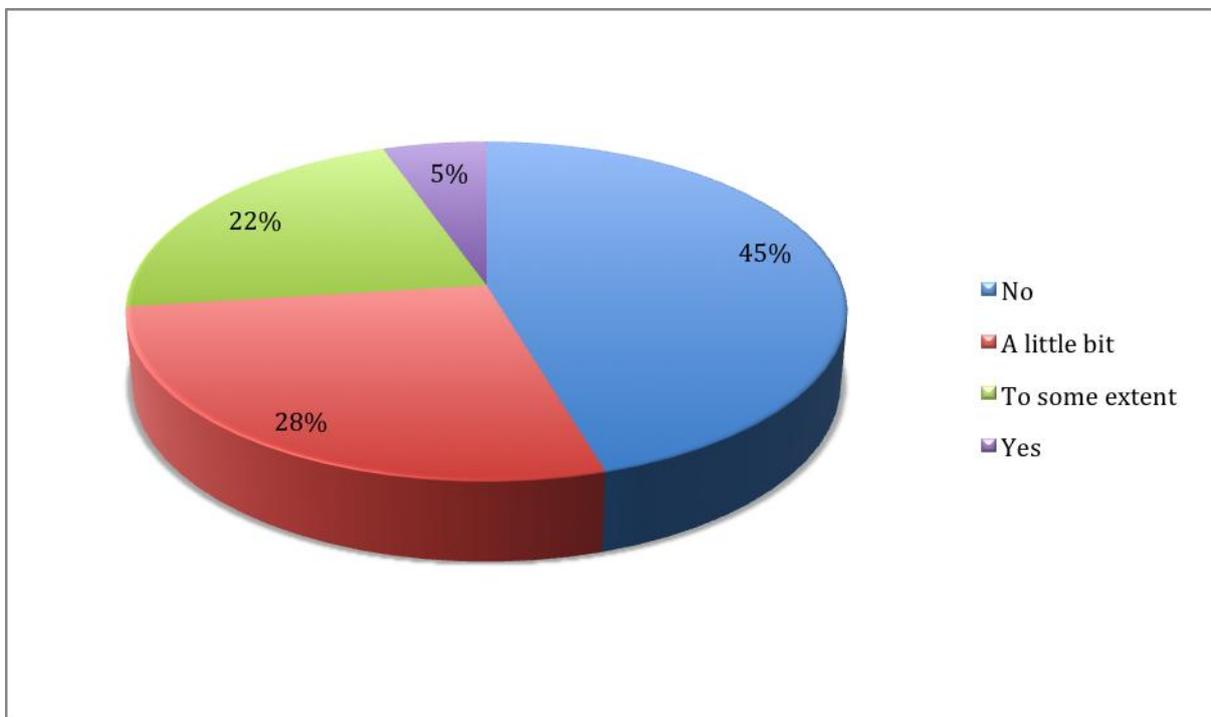


Figure 4. Adolescent perception on family financial difficulties

Also, 4.4% of adolescents reported being bullied.

There were no significant differences in reporting daily hassles related to family environment, physical state and bullying between male and female subjects. However, adolescent girls reported feeling stressed more frequently than adolescent males ( $p < 0.01$  – Pearson Chi-Square Test) – see Table 3.

Table 3

## Gender differences in stress perception

<i>Feel stressed (tense, restless, nervous, worries etc.)</i>	<i>Males (%)</i>	<i>Females (%)</i>
Never or a few times per year	52.8	32.5
Monthly	28.4	27.4
Weekly	7.4	14.8
A few days per week	7.6	16.9
Most days of the week	3.8	8.5

Also, emotional, concentration, behavioral or relational difficulties seem to upset or distress to a higher extent the females than the males ( $p < 0.01$  – Fisher's Exact Test) – see Table 4; and interfere more with their home life ( $p < 0.01$  – Fisher's Exact Test) and friendships ( $p = 0.01$  – Pearson Chi-Square Test) – see Table 4.

Table 4

## Gender differences in the degree of interference of psychological difficulties with home life and friendships

<i>Degree of interference</i>	<i>Home life</i>		<i>Friendships</i>	
	<i>Males (%)</i>	<i>Females (%)</i>	<i>Males (%)</i>	<i>Females (%)</i>
Not at all	66.3	49.9	49.7	35.3
Only a little	26.6	38.7	40.2	47.9
Quite a lot	6.5	8.8	7.7	13.5
A great deal	0.6	2.6	2.4	3.3

There were no gender differences in reporting financial difficulties of the family. However, significantly more males reported having a parent that lost their job during the previous year.

**Discussions.** As society evolves, the stressors affecting adolescents change, and if efficient strategies for improving mental health of adolescents are to be developed, knowledge of the nature and importance of these stressors is critical. For example, our results show that 12.7% of adolescents live without at least one of their parents, because of workforce migration. The effects of this fact on adolescents' mental health have received little attention thus far. Nevertheless, we can assume that this has an important negative effect on adolescents' mental health, since extensive research has shown that children whose parents fail to be supportive have a significantly higher risk of developing depression (Sheeber et al 2001).

Another important fact demonstrated by the present study is that 1 in 5 adolescents feel stressed several times a week and approximately 1 in 4 adolescents believes to have psychological difficulties that interfere with various domains of functioning. Furthermore, adolescent girls feel stressed more often than males, and think that the psychological difficulties they might have, have a more prominent effect on their home life and relations with peers. If we correlate this with the fact that gender differences in the prevalence of depression start to arise precisely in adolescence (Hankin et al 2007), and that poor social and family support are risk factors for development of several mental disorders (Hankin 2006), the necessity of developing prevention programs aiming at improving these aspects more specifically becomes obvious.

Approximately half the adolescents reported familial financial issues. This is of paramount importance, since social status has been incriminated as a risk factor for depression and other mental disorders in several studies (van Praag 2005). One interesting aspect revealed by our data is that although a significantly higher proportion of adolescent males report that at least one of their parents lost their job during the previous year, there were no gender differences in reporting familial financial issues. This might be due to specific aspects regarding employment in Romania – many working

without contracts. Hence, unemployment of parents should be carefully used in studies regarding stress in Romanians.

Last, but not least, we have shown that there are no differences in reporting bullying between genders and that this phenomena is less frequent in Romania, with only 4.4% of the adolescents included reporting being bullied as compared to 19.6% in the US, for example (Nansel et al 2001), or between 15 – 20% in other countries (King et al 1994).

**Conclusions.** Stressors that appear to be most relevant for adolescents in North-Western Romania are: financial difficulties of the family and psychological difficulties. There are no differences in reporting bullying between genders and that this phenomenon is less frequent in Romania. A greater attention should be payed to the effects of workforce migration.

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