

The Psychology of the Grade Six Achievement Test (G.S.A.T) in Jamaica

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Abstract

Introduction: The educational system of Jamaica is designed whereby performance is assessed based on formal evaluation (or test). This test culture places immense pressure on students at the primary level to successfully complete some examinations in order for placement into select schools.

Objectives: The present study seeks to evaluate psychological stress among students who take the G.S.A.T examination in the Corporate Area schools in Jamaica and assess whether psychological stressors influence academic performance.

Methods: For this research, mixed methodology was employed to investigate the phenomenon of stressors among students who took the 2013 G.S.A.T examination. For the survey instrument (questionnaire), the large volume of data were stored, retrieved and analyzed using the Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (S.P.S.S) for Windows version 21.0 (SPSS Inc; Chicago, IL, USA).

Findings: The overall academic performance of the surveyed respondents was high (75.8 ± 19.4 ; 95% CI: 72.4- 79.2), with students in the preparatory school (92.4 ± 4.1) outperformed those in the primary school (71.0 ± 19.4)- t -test =10280, $P < 0.0001$. The level of stress experienced by those in the public school was greater (29.9 ± 6.0 ; 95% CI: 28.9 – 30.1) than those in the private school (26.0 ± 3.9 ; 95% CI: 24.5- 27.4- t -test=-3.300, $P=0.001$). Five factors determine overall academic performance: 1) stress level, 2) parental involvement, 3) school type, 4) nervous on taking the first G.S.A.T examination and 5) school choice (traditional or non-traditional high school). The five factors accounted for 35.8 percentage points of the variance in overall academic performance (Adjusted R^2).

Conclusion: Parental involvement is crucial in academic performance among students who took the 2013 G.S.A.T examination and students experienced moderately high stress, which offers some insight in the examination and the information can be used to better guide policy formulation.

Keywords: Academic performance; Parental involvement; Psychological stressors; G.S.A.T; Jamaica

Introduction

The educational system of Jamaica is designed whereby performance is assessed based on formal evaluation (or test). The test is not only an indication of performance as it is a summary of capability, skills, knowledge, competence and aptitude for either employment or further studies. Hence, there is a test culture in Jamaica and other Caribbean nations, which have adopted the British Educational System. The test culture is embedded in the educational system in Jamaica that starts from pre-school (or basic school). The G.S.A.T examination is used to evaluate the performance of children at the primary level to determine their suitability for traditional or non-traditional high school placement [1-3]. The traditional high school (or grammar school) represents, 1) excellent academic performers, 2) competency and highly knowledgeable students, 3) students who are more likely to meet the requirements to attend universities, colleges and non-skilled professions. On the other hand, the non-traditional high school students are those who are less knowledgeable, more fitting for skilled professions and least likely to enter universities or colleges, which surmounts additional psychological stress on students at the primary school, grade 6, to perform in keeping with success, knowledge, competence and societal expectations.

Students who want to be viewed as 1) intelligent (or smart), 2) successful, 3) fulfilling the societal expectations and 4) having a desire for particular professions such as medicine, would desire to attend traditional high school. The psychological stress that comes with the G.S.A.T examinations are profound and warrant examination as to how it influences performance of the students. Since the implementation of the G.S.A.T exams, there have been many concerns about it [2-4]; and, rightfully so within the context of the aforementioned realities. Jamaica is not the only country that is dealing with the 'drawbacks' or has ever dealt with 'drawbacks' of any merit/placement exams. This is a global issue. Jamaica has been here before many times and as a result has had to make changes. Trinidad and Tobago has had to revise their assessment

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methods within the education system as they have moved from CEE to the now Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA) Examination that they are currently using.

Whether or not individuals are made aware of the negative stereotypes about how they should perform in a high-stakes testing situation, a stressful environment can adversely affect academic performance [5-11], which influences attitude to the subject and by extension performance [12-17]. A comprehensive review of the literature found no study in Jamaica that has examined academic achievement stressors at the Primary level in spite of the empirical evidence in the literature that shows that school related stressors influence academic performance as early as in adolescents [18], which is the rationale for this research. The objective of the present study is to evaluate psychological stress among students who take the G.S.A.T examination in the Corporate Area schools in Jamaica.

Materials and Methods

For this research, mixed methodology (i.e., survey research and phenomenology) was employed to investigate the phenomenon of stressors among students who took the 2013 G.S.A.T examination in two elementary schools in Jamaica. One hundred and thirty (n=130) pupils were sampled from one primary and one preparatory schools in lower St. Andrew, Jamaica. The two schools have been obtaining at least 70% of the pupils being placed in traditional school schools, top-achievers in the island. One of the school is public (called primary) and the other is a private (preparatory) elementary school. The rationale for selecting the two school is primarily because of the achievement of the pupils and to better understand the psychology of the G.S.A.T examination on high achievers. Data gathering was undertaken using 1) focus group discussions and 2) interviews. People who indicated 'no' were automatically eliminated from the sample. All interested participants were asked to read and complete an informed consent form (ICF). One of the sites for the interview was at different locations. Before proceeding to conduct the study at these locations, the researchers sought permission from those in authority. In addition, schools' administrators and parents as well as teachers were informed of the study and their inclusion were sought to participate in the actual research. Each participant was selected by convenience sampling method. Convenience sampling was also used to select those to be interviewed and an informed consent form was also given to them and only those who consented were interviewed. All selected participants were briefed on the nature and purpose of the study, as well as their right to participate or not. Data collection and analysis were undertaken over a four-month period (January-to-April 2013). The researchers utilized a thematic approach with narratives [19] to analysis the gathered data.

Prior to constructing the designed instrument, the researcher reviewed 'Designing and Conducting Survey Research' by [20]. The text provided critical insights in the construction of questions, which was equally supported by [21]. Based on the information within [20] and [21], the researchers formulated Interview Instruments for the various stakeholders (i.e. pupils, teachers and parents) as well as a standardized survey questionnaire. The items were written in English and vetted by scholars in the field as well as a methodologist and statistician. The questionnaire had mostly close-ended items and it was written in English, as this is general language in Jamaica. The questionnaire will include a 'Perceived Stress Scale' which was developed in 1983 by Cohen and colleagues. In this study, reliability of some items was based on *Equivalence Reliability* - Cronbach alpha [22]. This was compared based on high or low values of Cronbach alpha. Reliability was increased by

way of using 1) previously tested items (or questions), 2) pre-testing, testing and post-testing of items. Rosenberg Stress Item was used to determine the stress of students in this study. The Cronbach alpha for Perceived Stress Index was 0.760, for 14 items.

Statistical Analyses

For this survey instrument (questionnaire), the large volume of data were stored, retrieved and analyzed using the Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows version 21.0 (SPSS Inc; Chicago, IL, USA). Descriptive statistics were performed on the data as well as percentages and frequency distributions. Box plots were used to present bivariate findings (i.e. two variables - of which one was metric and the other was non-metric (dichotomous or otherwise)). Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed to examine a metric dependent variable and a single dichotomous non-metric independent variable. Univariate Analysis was used to examine the relationship between a single dependent variable and a set of independent variables. Statistical significance was determined a *P*-value less than or equal to five percentage points (≤ 0.05)-two-tailed.

Operational definitions

G.S.A.T is an abbreviation which represents the 'Grade Six Achievement Test' (formerly, Common Entrance Examination, CEE). This test (or examination) is taken by students in the final year of primary school in Jamaica, grade 6. It is used to determine the allocation of places to 1) traditional and 2) non-traditional high schools. 'Burnt out' denotes someone being unable to function at his/her potential owing to fatigue, fright, fear or other cognitive issues. Stressor is the emotional and physiological response to psychological events.

Results

Table 1 presents socio-demographic information on the selected surveyed sample. The surveyed sample was one hundred and thirty (130) six graders. Seventy-seven and seven tenth percentage points of the respondents were in a public school (primary) compared to 22.3 percentage points in a private school (preparatory). The mean age of the sample was 11.4 yrs. \pm 0.6 yr, with there being no statistical difference between the mean age of those in the public school (11.3 yrs. \pm 0.6 yr.) and those in the private school (11.5 yrs. \pm 0.6 yr.) - *t*-test =1.189, *P*=0.241. Almost 50 percentage points of the respondents in the public school were males compared to 55.2 percentage of those in the private

Description	Preparatory	Primary	Sample
Sex			
Male	16 (55.2)	50 (49.5)	66 (50.8)
Female	13 (44.8)	51 (50.5)	64 (49.2)
Reside with			
Both biological parents	12 (42.8)	57 (56.4)	69 (53.5)
Biological father, only	3 (10.7)	8 (7.9)	11 (8.5)
Biological mother, only	7 (25.0)	29 (28.7)	36 (27.9)
Siblings	1 (3.6)	2 (2.0)	3 (2.3)
Guardians	5 (17.9)	5 (5.0)	10 (7.8)
Religiosity			
Infrequent attendance	7 (25.0)	23 (23.0)	30 (23.4)
Frequent attendance	19 (67.9)	62 (62.0)	81 (63.3)
None	2 (7.1)	15 (15.0)	17 (13.3)
Age, Mean \pm SD	11.5 yrs. \pm 0.6 yr.	11.3 yrs. \pm 0.6 yr.	11.4 yrs. \pm 0.6 yr.

SD denotes standard deviation

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of sample, n=130

school, with there statistical difference between gender distribution of the sample based on school type ($\chi^2=0.290, P=0.591$). The majority of the respondents resided with both biological parents (53.5 percentage points) and when this was disaggregated by school type the numbers were statistically the same (Preparatory, 42.8%; Primary, 56.4%, $\chi^2=6.014, P=0.198$).

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics on overall academic performance of the surveyed sample and descriptive statistics for particular subjects (mathematics, language arts, science, social studies and communication tasks). The overall academic performance of the surveyed respondents was high (75.8 ± 19.4 ; 95% CI: 72.4-79.2), with students in preparatory school (92.4 ± 4.1) outperformed those in the primary school (71.0 ± 19.4)- $t\text{-test}=10280, P<0.0001$ and this was across all the subject areas (Table 2).

Table 3 presents an Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regression of selected variables and how they influence (or not) overall academic performance of the surveyed respondents. Of the ten (10) variables that were entered into the regression analysis, five (5) emerged as statistically significant factors of overall academic performance. This means that five factor influence overall academic performance of the students surveyed in this study. These factors are 1) stress level, 2) parental involvement, 3) school type, 4) nervous on sitting the first G.S.A.T examination and 5) school choice (traditional or non-traditional high school). The five factors account for 35.8 percentage points of the variance in overall academic performance (Adjusted R^2). The factor that contributed the most to overall academic performance of the surveyed respondents was type of school (beta weight=0.308) attended followed by parental involvement (beta weight=0.225), school choice (beta weight=0.220), stress (beta weight=-0.196) and feeling on sitting the first G.S.A.T paper (beta weight=0.194). Perceived stress was negatively correlated with overall academic performance ($b=-0.615$). Students whose parent(s) or guardian(s) were highly involved in the G.S.A.T preparation process had greater scores than those whose parents had limited involvement in the process. It should be noted here that students whose first choice was a traditional high school were more likely to obtain a higher score than those whose third choice was a traditional high school. Hence, overall academic performance of the respondents can be expressed in a linear function based on the information obtained from Table 3:

Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regressions of Mathematics and factors that influences this phenomenon. Of the ten (10) variables that were entered into the regression analysis, only four (4) emerged as statistically significant factors of performance in Mathematics.

Description	Preparatory	Primary	t-test, P	Sample
Overall academic performance				
Mean \pm SD	92.4 \pm 4.1	71.0 \pm 19.4	10.280, < 0.0001	75.8 \pm 19.4
Mathematics				
Mean \pm SD	93.4 \pm 5.9	70.7 \pm 20.9	9.672, <0.0001	75.8 \pm 20.9
Language Arts				
Mean \pm SD	93.5 \pm 5.9	71.9 \pm 18.6	10.067, <0.0001	76.7 \pm 18.9
Sciences				
Mean \pm SD	90.6 \pm 5.2	72.1 \pm 19.7	8.492, < 0.0001	76.2 \pm 19.1
Social Studies				
Mean \pm SD	89.9 \pm 5.7	72.6 \pm 19.5	7.823, < 0.0001	76.5 \pm 18.8
Communication Tasks				
Mean \pm SD	94.6 \pm 6.4	67.9 \pm 25.8	9.420, < 0.0001	73.9 \pm 25.5

Table 2: Academic performance of surveyed sample, n=130.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	P	95% Confidence Interval	
	B	Std. Error			Lower	Upper
(Constant)	79.085	23.755		0.001	31.972	126.197
Perceived Stress Index	-0.615	0.28	-0.196	0.03	-1.17	-0.06
Gender (1=Female)	-16.593	20.698	-0.086	0.425	-57.642	24.456
Parent(s) moderately involved	8.801	4.779	0.186	0.068	-0.677	18.279
Parent(s) highly involved	8.366	3.785	0.225	0.029	0.86	15.873
Parent(s) lowly involved						
First Choice Traditional High	35.218	16.055	0.182	0.031	3.376	67.06
Second Choice Traditional High	-21.492	8.278	-0.22	0.011	-37.91	-5.074
Third Choice Traditional High	15.376	5.891	0.242	0.01	3.692	27.059
Third choice Traditional High (reference)						
First G.S.A.T Exam Nervous	7.114	3.494	0.194	0.044	0.185	14.043
First G.S.A.T Exam Stressed	11.232	5.904	0.177	0.06	-0.478	22.942
First G.S.A.T Exam relax (reference)						
Second G.S.A.T Exam Nervous	2.333	3.789	0.055	0.539	-5.181	9.847
Second G.S.A.T Exam Stressed	-2.091	4.781	-0.034	0.663	-11.573	7.391
Second G.S.A.T Exam Relax (reference)						
Age	-2.614	1.494	-0.19	0.083	-5.577	0.35
Reside with Both Biological Parents	4.343	2.773	0.122	0.12	-1.156	9.843
Preparatory School	12.802	3.755	0.308	0.001	5.354	20.25
Infrequent Church Attendance	-1.19	5.101	-0.029	0.816	-11.304	8.928
Frequent Church Attendance	-0.811	4.461	-0.022	0.856	-9.661	8.039

Table 3: Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regression of selected variables and how they relate to overall academic performance, n=118, Model: $R^2=0.435$; Adjusted $R^2=0.358$; F statistic [14,103]=5.663, $P<0.0001$; Durbin Watson=2.0.

The four factors account for 34.0 percentage points of the variance in performance in Mathematics (Adjusted R^2) (Table 4).

Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regressions of Language Arts and factors that influences this phenomenon. Of the ten (10) variables that were entered into the regression analysis, only four (4) emerged as statistically significant factors of performance in Language Arts. The four factors account for 37.3 percentage points of the variance in performance in Language Arts (Adjusted R^2). However, parental

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	p	95.0% Confidence Interval	
	B	Std. Error	Beta		Lower	Upper
(Constant)	77.83	26.683		0.004	24.911	130.749
Perceived Stress Index	-0.659	0.314	-0.189	0.038	-1.282	-0.036
Gender (1=Female)	-16.311	23.249	-0.076	0.485	-62.419	29.798
Moderate Parental Involvement	7.977	5.368	0.153	0.14	-2.67	18.623
High Parental Involvement	9.376	4.251	0.228	0.03	0.944	17.807
Low Parental Involvement (Reference)						
First Choice – Traditional High	38.826	18.034	0.181	0.034	3.059	74.593
Second Choice – Traditional High	-25.541	9.299	-0.236	0.007	-43.982	-7.099
Third Choice –Traditional High	14.18	6.617	0.201	0.034	1.056	27.303
Feeling First G.S.A.T Exam -Nervous	3.556	3.925	0.088	0.367	-4.228	11.34
Feeling First G.S.A.T Exam -Stressed	11.917	6.632	0.169	0.075	-1.237	25.07
Feeling First G.S.A.T Exam -relax						
Feeling Second G.S.A.T Exam -Nervous	2.492	4.256	0.053	0.559	-5.948	10.932
Feeling Second G.S.A.T Exam -Stressed	-7.842	5.37	-0.116	0.147	-18.493	2.809
Age	-2.119	1.678	-0.139	0.21	-5.447	1.21
Reside with both Biological Parents	4.098	3.115	0.104	0.191	-2.08	10.275
Attended Preparatory School attend (1=Yes)	13.725	4.218	0.298	0.002	5.358	22.091

Table 4: Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regression of selected variables and how they relate to mathematics performance, n=117, Model: R²=0.419; Adjusted R²=0.340; F statistic [14,103]=5.307, P < 0.0001; Durbin Watson =2.0

involvement in the preparation of taking the examination did not influence students' performance in Language Arts (Table 5).

Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regressions of Communication Tasks and factors that influence this phenomenon. Of the ten (10) variables that were entered into the regression analysis, only four (4) emerged as statistically significant factors in performing Communication Tasks. These factors are 1) parental involvement, 2) school type, 3) feeling when taking the examination and 4) choice of school type (traditional or non-traditional high school) that the pupil wants to attend. The four factors account for 36.5 percentage points of the variance in how students perform in Communication Task (Adjusted R²). The factor that contributed the most to performance in Communication Task of the surveyed respondents was type of school attended (beta weight=0.284) and the other were school choice (beta weight=0.259), feeling when sat the examination (beta=0.219) and parental involvement (beta weight=0.218) (Table 6).

The qualitative inquiry concurs with the findings of the quantitative research on factors that influence academic performance of students. The researcher will classify the factors into two heading 1) positive and 2) negative influencers. It is clear from the various focus group discussions with the respondents that their teachers, parents, school environment and materials were critical ingredients that positively influence their academic performance. The respondents indicated involvement of their parents, somethings parents read the material for them, staying up with them when assignments are to be done, positive encouragement as well as some negative responses were important factors that influence better academic performance. The teachers' involvement, the way they provided informatin, provision of extra materials, encouragement and stimulated learning exercises were among the reasons which resulted in increased performance.

One female student gave a lengthy expression of parental involvement, which explains why this positively influences academic performance. "Well it was hard, but I think it was harder for my parents, because they had to wake me up, carry me to school, put me to bed and prepare my lunch. I think it was pressuring because I had a lot of

sleepless nights and I had to wake up very early because I live very far and my homework, I have to make sure that it is done because of the teacher I have. I can't bring in any unfinished homework." Another female expression speaks to the involvement of some parents (or guardians), which provides the bedrock for increased academic performance, when she remarked that "Sometimes when my teacher gave me home work, sometimes my mother don't understand it and then we reach home by 9:00 and finish my homework by 11:00 and then I wake up by 5:00 in the mornings." The positive statistical correlation that emerged between academic performance and parental involvement was overall emphasized in the qualitative research. One participant described it this way "My mom pressures me a lot and she's the one who get me to do the work. She really pressures me a lot to do welland she tries to help me to build up in my Com Task and Language Arts." The positive association between academic performance and parental involvement was captured another way by a participant who said "My mother always tries to find help for me and she's always there for me."

The pupils indicated that when parents (or guardians) as well as teachers become abusive in language or deeds, these become psychological stressors and detract from their academic performance. Among the negative influencers of academic performance were 1) people's expectations, 2) failure, 3) expressions that will be used to describe them, 4) the stigma associated with non-traditional high schools, 4) negative language used by teachers and parents (or guardians) and 5) internal interpretation of what may or may not be. A female respondent expressed psychological stressors of teachers this way "Because everytime yuh trying to read the questions yuh head start to hurt yuh and sometimes they say when yuh leave it out yuh can sometimes make a mistake and yuh might end up at Clan Carthy or Holy Trinity and sometimes den seh dat time is up."

In the quantitative research, the issue of time management was not examine as a factor of academic performance and this emerged in the qualitative study. All the students indicated that poor time management may result in failure and that this is critical to better performance. They also indicated that extra lessons, practice and more materials provide critical information that allow the person to better manage their time.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	P	95% Confidence Interval	
	B	Std. Error	Beta		Lower	Upper
Constant	84.547	22.585		0	39.756	129.338
Perceived Stress Index	-0.526	0.266	-0.174	0.041	-1.053	0.002
Gender (1=Female)	-0.011	19.678	0	1	-39.037	39.016
Moderate Parental Involvement	8.198	4.544	0.181	0.074	-0.813	17.209
High Parental Involvement	6.804	3.598	0.19	0.061	-0.332	13.941
Low Parental Involvement (reference)						
First Choice – Traditional High	28.892	15.265	0.155	0.061	-1.381	59.166
Second Choice – Traditional High	-21.449	7.87	-0.228	0.008	-37.058	-5.84
Third Choice – Traditional High	15.538	5.601	0.254	0.007	4.43	26.646
Feeling on sitting First G.S.A.T Exam Nervous	8.596	3.322	0.244	0.011	2.008	15.184
Feeling on sitting First G.S.A.T Exam - Stressed	9.513	5.614	0.156	0.093	-1.62	20.647
Feeling on sitting First G.S.A.T Exam – Relaxed (reference)						
Second G.S.A.T Exam - Nervous	1.798	3.602	0.044	0.619	-5.346	8.942
Second G.S.A.T Exam - Stressed	-3.096	4.546	-0.053	0.497	-12.111	5.919
Second G.S.A.T Exam – Relaxed (reference)						
Age	-2.688	1.421	-0.203	0.061	-5.505	0.13
Reside with both biological parents	4.122	2.636	0.121	0.121	-1.106	9.351
Preparatory School Attend (1=Yes)	14.257	3.57	0.356	0	7.176	21.338

Table 5: Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regression of selected variables and how they relate to Language Arts Performance, n=17, Model: R²=0.448; Adjusted R²=0.373; F statistic [14, 103]=5.973, P<0.0001; Durbin Watson=2.0

Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	P	95% Confidence Interval		
B	Std. Error	Beta		Lower	Upper	
Constant	78.112	31.413		0.015	15.811	140.413
Perceived Stress Index	-0.627	0.37	-0.15	0.093	-1.36	0.107
Gender (1=Female)	-58.83	27.37	-0.229	0.034	-113.113	-4.548
Moderate Parental Involvement	9.803	6.32	0.156	0.124	-2.73	22.337
High Parental Involvement	10.786	5.005	0.218	0.033	0.86	20.713
Low Parental Involvement (reference)						
First Choice – Traditional High	33.716	21.232	0.131	0.115	-8.392	75.823
Second Choice – Traditional High	-27.212	10.947	-0.209	0.015	-48.923	-5.501
Third Choice – Traditional High	21.916	7.79	0.259	0.006	6.466	37.365
Felling when sat First G.S.A.T Exam -Nervous	10.679	4.62	0.219	0.023	1.516	19.843
Feeling when sat First G.S.A.T Exam -Stressed	12.98	7.808	0.153	0.099	-2.506	28.465
Feeling when sat First G.S.A.T relax (reference)						
Feeling when sat Second G.S.A.T Exam - Nervous	4.183	5.01	0.074	0.406	-5.754	14.119
Feeling when sat Second G.S.A.T Exam - Stressed	-1.855	6.323	-0.023	0.77	-14.394	10.684
Feeling when sat Second G.S.A.T relax (reference)						
Age	-3.014	1.976	-0.165	0.13	-6.933	0.905
Reside with both biological parents	5.766	3.667	0.122	0.119	-1.506	13.039
Preparatory School Attend (1=Yes)	15.738	4.966	0.284	0.002	5.889	25.587

Table 6: Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regression of selected variables and how they relate Com. Tasks performance, n = 117, Model: R² =0.441; Adjusted R² = 0.365; F statistic [14, 103] = 5.811, P < 0.0001; Durbin Watson = 2.0

Outside of the factors that emerged in the quantitative research, the qualitative discovered that coping skills are critical to positive academic performance. One respondent said that “I pray a little and then I just loosen my hair and unlock my belt and then I just start to do the exam” “as an approach to psychological address the challenge of examination”. Another said that “Pray before you do the exam”, which was echoed by many people in this study as an effective approach to dealing with examination stressors. The relief of coping skills account for the stimulating of positive psychological energy that explain how the child will view things and be better able to interpret issues. This is captured in a statement made by a female student that “I pray and then I started the exam and then I feel a little better”. It is this feeling that allows the pupil to adequate deal with examination stressors. The coping strategies

employed by students vary and they all concur that these play a role in better (or worse) academic performance.

While parental involvement is among the factor that influence academic performance in sixth grade, the quantitative research did not explore expectations. In the qualitative research, there was a consensus among the students that expectation is associated with academic performance. “I woulda feel sad and a kind of angry because I don’t pass for the traditional school that I pick for because if I pass for a non-traditional high my parents would be very angry "internet and see if some of the schools she chose if it’s a bad school or good school.” “I would feel like I’m a failure I don’t keep my head down I still looking for the best” a pupil said and this clearly must play a role in how students view things on the examination as the expectation aids to the intensity

of the preparation. The expectation phenomenon as a performance booster was explained by all the students in the focus groups. In fact, one student summarized it this way that "My first choice is Champion High so I have to work hard because their academic standard is way up there yeah", which was also expressed by another student that "Well my first choice is Immaculate Conception High for Girls cause I live very, very far. I had to work very hard and each mock exam we got I had to try and do my best and a high score."

Preparation emerged as a factor that influence academic performance among the respondents in the qualitative research. All the students indicated that preparation is a key ingredient in the successful outcome of an examination. While this was not included among the variables investigated in the quantitative research, it was identified across the focus groups that preparation is vital to the academic performance. "I had a timetable and attacked my weakest subject first", one respondent said. This speaks to the pre-preparation strategies that are employed by students in preparing for the G.S.A.T examinations. A female student said "Well I prepared. I made sure to go to different teachers to understand it much better and as she said I attacked the weakest subject first, Math", which was echoed across the focus groups and an approach imparted to students to improve general performance. It is the pre-preparation strategies that are employed by the students that they rely on for a good performance on the actual examination and this is expressed by a female student that "Miss I studied alot and I hope that I'm happy with the results." A male student, on the other hand, explained his pre-preparation approach this way "I studied the notes that I got from my teacher and made sure that I memorized all of the mock exams that I did." Few of the participants have elongated responses to a question and one of them was related to the value of preparation. The participant remarked "At first when I was in grade 5 I thought the G.S.A.T would be easy that we would just splash through it and go on but when we get to grade 6 now all the parents and teachers just pressuring you and church, "I hope you do you do yuh best! I hope you are prepared!" and I got really tired of it and at that point I got nervous but as G.S.A.T approached and walked into the room, I was ok, it was like any other school day."

Personal dreams or desires emerged as a factor among students that influence academic performance. The pupils' personal dreams play a role in influencing them to place greater effort in studying and ensuring that they do well in order to meet the standards of that institution. One respondent mentioned that "My first choice is Champion College and from I was a little girl I wanted to go so I had to work very hard." Another female opined that "Knowing that I wanted to go to that school I had to work hard. I just had to do my best. I just had to study and well cause I want the results to be Ardenne." The relationship between academic performance and efforts because of dreams and/or desires was described by a female this way "Well since I want to go to Wolmers I have to make my work be over 96% so I try hard in my Language and Com Task. I did my best and I hope I pass for that school."

Social expectation is a motivator for students to perform in academic and this was expressed by all the participants in the focus group discussions. A male participant said "Miss my first choice is K.C. Miss I want to go to K.C. because my brother went to K.C. and now he's a detective." He continued that "Except I want to be at a high standard than he is", which provides a clear justification of how social expectation can aid academic performance among students.

Although the participants did not used the phrase anxiety level-examination, it is clear having reviewed all the transcripts that the G.S.A.T is an anxiety level-examination. The participants spoke of this

indirectly, when they used the phrase 1) "Miss it's so weird because we were all dying for the day to come and go and now we are here worrying about the results"; 2) "I had to go extra lessons and other places, I also went to Saturday classes and sometimes Sunday classes"; 3) "I feel a little anxious because now I have to wait on the results."; 4) "it was really hard because we got a lot of homework and I had to go to extra lessons at my school and another school."; 5) "it was very hard because I had to be going through pass papers and it was hard because it was a lot" and 6) our teacher gives us a lot of work all the time and sometimes yuh can't even get to relax". The perspectives forwarded by the participants, as state above, are clear indications that G.S.A.T is anxiety level-examination, which emerged in the qualitative research as a factor that influences academic performance. Such reality provide a basis upon which future quantitative studies can include this factors and test that have an impact on academic performance as well as its strength on performance. One participant's comments succinctly summarized the anxiety level of the G.S.A.T, when she remarked that "*I was there praying and hoping that the paper wouldn't be hard.*"

On perusing the transcripts of the participants, the researcher realized that the G.S.A.T examination is a high stake venture, similar to the general elections, lottery and winning in sports. There was an undercurrent that the G.S.A.T examination determines future choices, perception of the society, availability of resources, subject availability and future social advancement in the Jamaican society. Those facts are known by the students and this explains why the effort is placed into high performance. The G.S.A.T examination can be likened to winning the sprint races at the Olympics. The stakes are high as the winner is entitled to 1) endorsement contracts, 2) greater post race appearance fees, 3) media coverage, 4) accolades, 5) personal recognition and 6) other incentives. For the G.S.A.T examination the incentives are 1) the stigma of 'bright', 2) acceptance by society of your academic capabilities, 3) social acceptance by peers, family and friends, 4) choices of particular resource availability, 5) association with people of old (past students) and 6) personal gratification owing all the aforementioned issues. Those positive reinforcers are the justification as to why many of the students are will to make the sacrifice of assiduously work in order to be placed in a traditional high school. This was not examined in the quantitative study, but it emerged as a potent factor that influences academic performance of students who wrote the 2013 G.S.A.T examinations. The previously stated issues can be fitted in the expressions of participants who claimed 1) "my parents place a lot of emphasis, because if I don't pass for a traditional high school my family would be disappointed"; 2) "My parents want me to go to a traditional high school because my brother passed for one so I should do the same"; 3) "my parents send me to extra classes and stuff so that I can get good grades and go to a good school" and 4) "I would consider it a failure because if other children pass for that school and I don't I will cry." Like the winner of the sprint races in at the Olympics, there is only one winner and for the G.S.A.T this is similar as there are only X number of places allotted to candidates who write the G.S.A.T to attend a traditional high school.

The elite interviews with the teachers revealed insightful issues and provided rich qualitative expressions that were lacking in the quantitative study. The teachers commented that they spent a vast number of hours, prepare, teaching, providing guidance and leadership, encouragement, tools and techniques that should be employed to successfully write the G.S.A.T examinations. Teachers' involvement was excluded from among the many selected variables for the quantitative study and this was an oversight on the path of the teacher. Despite this oversight, it was evident from the transcripts as well as the students' (or participants') comments that their teachers impact their performance.

The rationale for the aforementioned issue was captured in a statement made by a teacher that “I spent longer hours and the week is longer as I teach for six days, we also have winter classes. I tend to use a lot of pass papers so that the students can practice what is taught” and this was concurred by the others. Another commented that “Because I want each student to be placed in their school of choice I place more emphasis on academics than anything else.”

The high stake examination that G.S.A.T is took a toll on the teachers as well as the students. All the teachers opined that the preparation for the examination was intense and one said “Outside of teaching them we have play time and I try to help them to cope with the stress of the exam even though I was feeling stressed at the time as well.” The nature, perception and expectation of the G.S.A.T examination was a high involvement for the students as well as the teachers. One teacher commented that “Sometimes I suffered from headaches because the students were not responding in the way that I wanted them to. The headaches I think were from the fear of not achieving my goals. Being a prep school, parents place a great emphasis on performance of the teacher and so this places some amount of pressure on me.” This placed high stake nature of the G.S.A.T examination and shows that expectation of success is equally a phenomenon of the student as it is of the teacher.

The teachers concurred with the participants (students) that coping skills play a role in academic performance and that both teachers and students must devised mechanisms on how to best alleviate the stress of the preparation process for the G.S.A.T. A comment made by a teacher speaks to the nature of the examination and explains the teacher’s role in better academic performance of his/her students. “I try my best to help my students to cope as they go through the preparation process. I try to help them to stay calm as they try to achieve a place in the school of their choice” she said. Another female teacher showed how she addresses the issue surrounding the high intensity nature of the G.S.A.T examination, which was subtly used to as a coping mechanism. She indicated that “I don’t really place the emphasis on placement but that of the abilities of the students I teach. I wouldn’t expect a child with a 70% average to go to Champion that would just be ridiculous on my part, but what I do is try to bring out the best in each child as I prepare them for the exams.”

The elite interviews with some parents provided explanation of parental involvement as a factor in academic performance. While the quantitative study empirically established that such an associated existed, it did not provide the beliefs, expressions and feelings behind the data provided by the qualitative inquiry. A parent began that “now that the G.S.A.T examinations have passed I am less stressed.” Another provided the reasons parental involvement positively influences academic performance, when he said that “We used various materials like the Go G.S.A.T program and past papers and he was always at extra classes as well as one to one studying.” The aforementioned issue concurred with the views of the students who show parental involvement and sometimes the extent of their involvement. This is captured in this statement made by a parent that “A lot because there were some subject areas that I took on and there are others that his mother dealt with”, which showed how involved some parent (guardian) became.

Parental involvement was based on the societal expectations and interpretations of the student’s performance. One parent (or guardian) noted why he became involved in the pre-preparation process of his child, when he commented that “Very much because it is very difficult because if the child doesn’t get that school he’ll be seen as failure.” This

encapsulates the high stake nature of the examination and the stressors levied on the students by society to attain a particular performance which will be expressed in the school choice allotted by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture.

Stress

The level of stress among six graders in a public and a private elementary school was moderate (29.0 ± 5.8 ; 95% CI: 28.0-30.0), with the maximum stress index being 56.0. However, the level of stress experienced by those in the public school was greater (29.9 ± 6.0 ; 95% CI: 28.9- 30.1) than those in the private school (26.0 ± 3.9 ; 95% CI: 24.5-27.4; t -test=-3.300, $P=0.001$). The level of stress experienced by males was 29.6 ± 6.0 (95% CI: 28.2-31.1) compared to 28.3 ± 5.6 (95%CI: 26.9- 29.7), which is statistical the same ($t=1.267$, $P=0.207$). There is no statistical difference in the stress level of the students when parents are involved, irrespective of the degree of involvement ($F=0.199$, $P=0.820$). The level of stress among the students were 28.1 ± 5.7 , 95% CI: 25.6-30.6; 29.3 ± 7.4 , 95% CI: 25.8-28.0; and 28.6 ± 5.2 , 95%CI: 27.4-29.8 being low, moderate and high respectively.

The stress level of student and their perception of how their parent would behave if they are placed in a non-traditional high school. The mean level of stress experienced by those who indicated that their parents would be happy was 34.0 ± 5.0 (95% CI: 26.1- 41.9) compared to those who indicated sad (28.7 ± 5.7 , 95% CI: 27.6- 29.8) and those who expressed no emotion (30.9 ± 6.6 , 95%CI: 26.1-35.7), which was statistically the same F statistic=2.183, $P=0.177$.

Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regressions of Stress Level and factors that influences this phenomenon. Of the ten (10) variables that were entered into the regression analysis, three (3) emerged as statistically significant factors that influence Stress Level among the sampled respondents (Table 7).

The perception of students as to how they felt prior to writing the first paper in the 2013 G.S.A.T examinations. The majority of the respondents indicated that they were nervous (60.5%) compared to 30.2% who indicated relaxed and 9.3% who said stressed.

The perception of students and how they felt prior to writing the second paper in the 2013 G.S.A.T examinations. The majority of the respondents indicated that they were relaxed (69.0%) compared to 21.9% who indicated nervous and 10.2% who said stressed. In the qualitative inquiry, respondents recalled how they felt prior to writing the first paper in the 2013 G.S.A.T examinations. They offered various expressions that summarized their feelings and these are examined herein. The majority of them said they were nervous prior to writing the first paper and that the feeling lessened for the subsequent papers. One young female respondents remarked “I feel relieved that all the stress is gone” and continued that “I feel very relieved because it was nerve wracking because we always have to study all the time”. She also said “I feel relieved and happy as well because the preparation was hard as we had to wake up early in the morning and go to our beds late in the nights”. A young male respondent summarized his feelings as “ I feel relieved because the stress is gone and I don’t have to go to my bed at 1:00 am to finish all the homework.” He continued that “I prepare by studying day and night. When I reach home I take up my book and start studying from 9:00 straight until 11:00.” Another male respondent indicated that “I found the preparation a bit hard”. “The preparation was stressing because we had sleepless nights and we got a lot of notes and we had to go home and review all that was taught” a respondent said. A young man aptly stated his feeling of the examination this way that “our

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	P	95% Confidence Interval	
	B	Std. Error	Beta		Lower	Upper
Constant	30.953	10.75		0.005	9.635	52.272
Overall Academic Performance	-0.076	0.033	-0.238	0.022	-0.14	-0.011
Preparatory School Attend (1=Yes)	-3.991	1.275	-0.301	0.002	-6.519	-1.464
Reside with both biological parents	0.563	0.961	0.05	0.559	-1.343	2.47
Moderate Parental Involvement	2.23	1.61	0.148	0.169	-0.963	5.422
High Parental Involvement	1.665	1.286	0.141	0.198	-0.885	4.214
Low Parental Involvement (reference)						
First Choice – Traditional High	10.322	5.537	0.168	0.065	-0.658	21.302
Second Choice - Traditional High	-3.86	2.889	-0.124	0.184	-9.588	1.869
Third Choice – Traditional High	-0.796	2.011	-0.039	0.693	-4.783	3.191
Felt when sat First G.S.A.T Exam -Nervous	4.772	1.11	0.409	0	2.571	6.972
Felt when sat First G.S.A.T Exam -Stressed	6.415	1.91	0.317	0.001	2.627	10.203
Felt when sat First G.S.A.T Exam –relax (reference)						
Felt when sat Second G.S.A.T Exam -Nervous	4.078	1.218	0.3	0.001	1.663	6.492
Felt when sat Second G.S.A.T Exam - Stressed	0.826	1.652	0.043	0.618	-2.451	4.102
Felt when sat Second G.S.A.T Exam – relax (referenced)						
Age	-0.654	0.817	-0.067	0.425	-2.273	0.965

Model: R²=0.335; Adjusted R²=0.252; F statistic [14,103]=4.030, P<0.0001; Durbin Watson=2.0

Table 7: Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regression of selected variables stress level, n=117

teacher gives us a lot of work and most of them was a bit challenging and then G.S.A.T was challenging but not so much.”

The students claimed that the preparation was more intense for the examination and the examination did not appear to be all that as was indicated by their teachers and parents. Respondents stated their account of preparation occasions and indicate they were placed on extreme stress for the examination. “It [examination] was very stressful because if we do a problem and we get it wrong, we must start all over and there is no excuse for incorrect responses”, one respondent said. Another respondent opined that “It was very stressful everyday my parents and I had disagreements. I have to go to my bed late and stay at school late and put in extra hours. Den yuh hear dem, come an duh di work, yuh naah get nuh food till yuh done di work”; others said “Very stressing miss, it’s stressing because on the weekend we get extra homework and my auntie is like, yuh not getting any food until all of this homework is done”; “Mi modda seh dat wat she learn in school and what I learn in school are different and sometimes she seh she going to kill mi”; It was very stressing because in the morning I wake early and go to bed late in the nights. Miss I lost a lot of weight.”

The pupils mentioned that the preparation stress for the examination was levied by both teachers and parents and that sometimes it felt overbearing. One male respondents described how his parent’s behaviour in the preparation state this way “yuh don’t want to go to JC. Yuh have to do this, yuh have to do that, yuh have to tek up yuh book, yuh have to clean yuh shoes, do it now!” There were other less frightening claims made by parents in the preparation stage of the G.S.A.T examination, but many parents (or guardians) were actively involved in their children’s preparation and different strategies were employed by them. One young male said “My parents are very involved! Miss when I was preparing for G.S.A.T miss, I couldn’t watch tv in the week. Mommy had to be telling me every minute to go to my room and study. At one point they even lock the door and let me stay inside and study all the time” Another male recalled that “Miss yuh si ma auntie when ah come from church on Sunday. Yuh si when I sit down and trying to relax, she keep on coming anseh, “look at de bwoy weh a guh do G.S.A.T! Get up anguh study!” And Miss she jus sen

mi in de washroom and lock de door.” The involvement of the parents was captured aptly in the perspective of a female student on parental involvement this way “Miss my parents are very involved . My mother reads all my books and highlight the important points.”

The intensity of the preparation of the respondents aided the psychological stressors associated with the examination. This was internalized by many of the pupils, some feared the error, some dreaded mishaps and many wanted to fulfill their parents and/or teachers expectations. The respondents used various expressions to summarize how they felt prior to sitting the first examination and these are used in this research. One male respondent said “Mind popping!” and another indicated “it was nerve wracking!”, which was also the case among the female respondents. “I was very nervous cause I was wondering which school would I pass for miss and I was like getting jittery and stuff miss,” a female said. Another mentioned that “I was there just sitting there and wondering if I’m going to pass and what if I don’t pass and which school I’m going to go or maybe I don’t go to the school that I want to go.” Like the previous female, a male respondent internalize the outcome of his action even prior to writing the first paper and there were clear indication that what many of the students fear was the outcome and this resulted in physiological issues. One male said “I have to wonder which school I’m going to go, my head just start to hurt me. At one point ah almost faint so that is why it was killing me.”

The stressors of preparation of the G.S.A.T examination was intense for the pupils and many noted that they felt like their heads was about to implode. One respondents describe his feeling this way “I had to get counseling!”, a female said “I felt as thought I was about to explode.” Another psychological stress identified by all the respondents was the likely outcome of being placed in a non-traditional high school and that they occupied their minds in the pre-preparation stage for the examination. A respondent remarked that “I would not show my face again because if I show my face miss, somebody is going to ask and I just couldn’t show my face miss.” Some of the psychological stressors of preparation was induced by parents (or guardians) and this was expressed by many of the respondents and one male expressed it this way that “My auntie say that if I don’t pass she’s going to beat me so

soft that I would turn into porridge and my mother would have to pick me up with a spoon.” Another respondent capture his internal demon this way “I would feel extremely sad and angry, miserable and it drive me insane if I didn’t pass for a traditional high school.” The extreme psychological stressors of pre-preparation of the G.S.A.T examination is causing much fear for students and this was aptly expressed by a male this way “I would feel like a loser. Miss because I worked very hard and study all day Saturday and when I come from church on Sunday.”

The students expressed that the preparation, fear of failure, the public interpretation of their efforts, school choice, stigma associated with particular school types and the efforts made by their teachers and parents (or guardians) as well as the expectations placed a significant psychological burden on them. Following the preparation, the majority of the respondents indicated that the examination did not seem to be worth the fear that was placed on them. It was not before the second paper that they felt more comfortable and began working in a more relaxed mental space. The psychological stressors of the preparation were intense and many expressed relief that they had completed the G.S.A.T examination. One female respondent’s expression summarized the feelings of all the other pupils when she remarked “I feel good and happy that I’ve done my G.S.A.T and I’m finished with grade 6” and a male said “I feel happy because I have freedom...” These sentiments were echoed by all the pupils. The psychological stressors for many of the students were the things they were deprived and limited options that are available to them in the preparation stage of the examination. Hence, a male’s statement summarized the withheld things this way “When G.S.A.T was coming couldn’t watch tv, I couldn’t go anywhere” and another remarked “mi madda stop badda mi bout G.S.A.T!”

The parents and teacher concurred with the students that G.S.A.T examination is a high stake examination with much stress. They noted that the stress of the examination is both psychological and physical as well as social and that these are experienced by them as well as the students. They argued that their involvement in the preparation process of the G.S.A.T examination saw them learning some of the material (parents), teachers researched materials, examined past papers and explore different teaching strategies that may prove to be more beneficial to the students. Like the teachers, the parents commented that among the stressors for the G.S.A.T examinations were 1) high stake examination, 2) anxiety, 3) societal expectation, 4) school choice, 5) fear of disappointment, 6) past reports from friends, family and peers on the G.S.A.T examination and 7) past examination papers.

Limitations

This researcher has a fundamental limitation as it examines the studied issues from two of the better performing students in the Corporate Area and therefore does not reflect a generalized perspective on the matter. It can be deduced from the present research that the situations identified therein could be worse because the selection of the current sampled respondents is an indicator of the high achievers.

Discussion and Conclusion

Parents are continuously pressuring their child/ren, as well as the wider society, to perform based on the cultured expectation, this sometimes frustrate children who are unable to attain this mark. The expectation of excellent academic performance is then brought over into the primary (or preparatory) school and the pressure to perform becomes even more intense for those at this level. In early part of the primary (or preparatory) level schooling is not as intense as the latter years because ‘Grade Six Achievement Test (G.S.A.T, formerly

Common Entrance Examination (CEE)). The G.S.A.T examination is what is used to evaluate the performance of children at the primary level to determine their suitability for traditional or non-traditional high school placement. The traditional high school (or grammar school) represents, 1) excellent academic performers, 2) competency and highly knowledge children, 3) students who are more likely to fit into universities and colleges and non-skilled professions. On the other hand, the non-traditional high school students are those who are less knowledgeable, more fitting for skilled professions and least likely to enter universities. It is this cultured reality in the society which surmounts additional psychological stress on students at the primary school, grade six (6), to performance in keeping with success, knowledge, competence and societal expectations.

The present study highlighted that pupils who took the 2013 G.S.A.T examination admitted to experiencing psychosocial pressure in wanting to attend a traditional high school. The literature shows there is a direct relationship between stress and academic performance (Yasin and Dzulkifli), which is also identified for the present work among students who sat for the G.S.A.T examinations in Jamaica. The current work concurs with the literature that the G.S.A.T examination is a high stress one for many students in Jamaica [3,4,23]. The literature indicated that pupils with psychological challenges received lower academic scores compared to those who do not (Fine and Carlson, Stark and Brookman, Vogel and Collins) and the current work found a negative statistical correlation between stress and academic performance among the sampled respondents. Some of the expressions of the students in this work present the extent of the psychosocial pressure of the G.S.A.T examinations and that the psychosocial stressors extend beyond the pupils to teachers and parents.

The psychological stress of that comes with the G.S.A.T examinations are profound and this is no difference for students at other level (Hill and Wigfield, Frey, Hughes, Jackson, DuBois and Erwin). Hill and Wigfield forwarded that achievement stress is an ‘invisible disability’ which embedded in the socialization of children, schooling and that is rarely detected. Embedded in Hill and Wigfield’s perspective is the involvement of the social milieu which includes the parents and teachers. This work found that parental involvement was the most significant factor influencing academic performance of students at the G.S.A.T level. Parental involvement plays a crucial role in the academic performance of students [24-28]. Parental involvement include 1) parents actively engaging in the examination process, 2) studying the material in order to understand and better impart the knowledge to their children, 3) parent creating an home environment that is conducive to studying and insisting that child does the degree of work required for the examination 4) purchasing materials for the examination, 5) taking the children to extra preparation sessions like Go-G.S.A.T, 6) staying up with children when assignments should be completed, 7) aiding children in preparing for the various subjects and 8) guiding children in how to prepare and cope with challenges and stressors.

The cultured expectation influences the parents’ as well as the teachers’ involvement in the preparation process in and of itself is a psychological stressor for the students which are rarely recognized by outsiders. One parent (or guardian) noted why he became involved in the preparation process of his child, when he commented that “Very much because it is very difficult because if the child doesn’t get that school he’ll be seen as failure.” This encapsulates the high stake nature of the examination and the stressors levied on the students by society to attain a particular performance which will be expressed in the school

choice allotted by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture. There is no denial here that involvement of parents owing to social expectation will add more psychological stress on the child who must internalize parental and social expectation, as well as academic excellence. The participants in this study mentioned that when parents (or guardians) as well as teachers become abusive in language or deeds, these become psychological stressors and detract from their academic performance. A female respondent expressed psychological stressors of teachers this way that "Because everytime yuh trying to read the questions yuh head start to hurt yuh and sometimes they say when yuh leave it out yuh can sometimes make a mistake and yuh might end up at Clan Carthy or Holy Trinity and sometimes den sehdat time is up." The aforementioned psychological stressor which is levied against the students who sat for the G.S.A.T examinations is not limited to teachers involvement (positive or negative), but the same can be said of the parents.

Although in this study parental involvement was positively correlated with academic performance, which is equally the case for teachers, the demands made by these individuals are a part of the stressors on the students. The participants in this work spoke of the reduced leisure time, social engagement, sleep time and high expectations placed on them by their parents as well as teachers, which offer some explanation of the demands of high stake examinations on human body. Selye purported that stress is a "non-specific response of the body to any demands made upon it" (Selye), indicating that the actions of parents as well as teachers as it relates to how the pupils should operate in the pre-preparation stage increases academic stress and offer some explanation of reduced academic achievements owing to 'burnout' (Rohland, Kruse and Rohrer). Many of the students in the current work expressed relief that the examinations were finished and that many of the restriction can be lifted and that they can again have a normal life. Like the students, the parents and teachers also expression relief that the examinations have been completed and some expressed that the process has resulted in physical ill-health.

Many of the parents were overly concerned about their children attending traditional high schools that they became enforcers in ensuring that the children prepare and is prepared for this high stake examination (G.S.A.T). Unlike the parents, the teachers had to balance the demands for this high stake examination with the coping strategies as they witnessed some students succumbing to the pressure. In fact, there were instances when students opted not to write the examinations, vomit on examination day, panic and faint on the day of the examinations and the dread of writing the papers. There were clear instances of pre-examination nervousness among the students and like the students the same thing was felt by parents and teachers. Dziegielewski et al. and Garret, noted that being able to effectively address stress increased the student chance of academically succeeding. Hence, being unable to address stress accounts for academic failure (Hill and Sarason) and this explains the failure of many students at the G.S.A.T level.

Emerging out of this study is the high probability of depression experienced among many of the students who took the 2013 G.S.A.T examination. These comments encapsulate the nature and psychological component brought on students who take the G.S.A.T examination annually, which included 1) "Miss it's so weird because we were all dying for the day to come and go and now we are here worrying about the results"; 2) "I had to go extra lessons and other places, I also went to Saturday classes and sometimes Sunday classes"; 3) "I feel a little anxious because now I have to wait on the results."; 4) "it was really hard because we got a lot of homework and I had to go to extra lessons at my school and another school"; 5) "it was very hard because I had to be going

through pass papers and it was hard because it was a lot" and 6) our teacher gives us a lot of work all the time and sometimes yuh can't even get to relax". The underlying issue of depression is not recognized by parents, teachers and/or parents; but if an account given by a parent is anything to go by then depression would have affected many of the pupils. A parent noted that now that the G.S.A.T examinations have passed "I am less stressed", which explains that some students were overly nervous, experienced sweaty palms, fear and dreaded the examination, spaced out and spent a great deal of time in the bathroom.

According to the World Health Organization (2005), by the year 2020, depression will be the second leading cause of death and disability across the world. WHO further states that depression starts at a very early age and this has implications for children's mental health in the later years. As a consequence, there should be an increase access to skills and resources for children, ages 6 -12 years old, to help them develop and maintain a healthy self-esteem and taught how to cope with high stake situations such as examinations. WHO points to two important intervention programs that should be implemented to 1) Develop a "take home" self esteem education package for 6 -12 years old and 2) Develop a self-esteem educational display for 6 -12 years old and their careers. The aforementioned programs have omitted the coping strategies in high stake situations for children 6-12 years old, guidance through the likelihood of being depressed and how parents, teachers and wider society should be able to identify depressive episodes among young children as well as those with low self-esteem.

Many theorists have seen the benefit of high self esteem as it relates to students academic performance. For example, Hisken notes that: Low self-esteem may prevent students from tackling difficult situations or feel satisfaction from their progress and success. Positive school climates where students feel connected with their peers helps lead to self-confident student (p.24).

She points to similar findings identified by Sweets. To this regard, it is generally believed that there are many benefits to having a positive belief of self. According to Branden, person's with high self esteem are perceived to have psychologically happy and healthy lives, whereas those with low self esteem are believed to be psychologically distressed and perhaps even depressed. It is argued that having high self esteem apparently provides benefits to those who possess it: they feel good about themselves and are better able to cope effectively with challenges and they live in a social world in which they believe that people value and respect them.

Although there are negative consequences associated with high level of self esteem [29], most people with high self esteem appear to lead happy and productive lives. By contrast, people with low self esteem generally dislike themselves and this colours their perceptions of everything around them. Substantial evidence shows a link between self esteem and depression, shyness, loneliness and alienation: low self esteem is averse to those who have it. Therefore, self esteem affects the enjoyment of life even if it does not have a substantial impact on career success, productivity, or other objective outcome measures [23]. indicated that in sampling a group of fourth graders in an innercity primary school in St. Andrew as well as a preparatory school that there is a strong statistical correlation between self-esteem and academic performance, which offers an explanation for the lower performance among those in the public schools compared to those in the private schools in this work.

Jamaica is not the only country that is dealing with the 'drawbacks' or has ever dealt with 'drawbacks' of any merit/placement examination.

This is a global issue. Jamaica has been there before many times and as a result has had to make changes. Trinidad and Tobago has had to revise their assessment methods within the education system as they have moved from CEE to the now SEA. There was a recognition that the G.S.A.T examination (formerly Common Entrance Examination, CEE) intense for the young minds and that this high stake examination was not effectively preparing students for the secondary educational level. Even today, the intensity of G.S.A.T examinations is profound, its effectiveness are two-fold (i.e. good or bad) and that we are destroying cognitive development of young children than building it. The literature has already established that some children are not coping with the school's stressors and that these are affecting academic performance [30], which also emerged from this study among children 11-to-12 years old and this is allowed to continue in Jamaica.

In Trinidad and Tobago, they have re-evaluated secondary entrance examination [1]. Common Entrance Exam was abolished in 2001 while Kamala Persad-Bissessar was the Minister of Education. It has since been replaced with Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA). The Secondary Entrance Assessment, a system of education which prepared the child for entry into a secondary school and included mechanisms to determine when the child was ready and where he or she would be placed, this is the major aim of that new system of education. Embedded in this system (SEA) is the reality that older children can be kept back in primary school and this could have a negative interpretation. He/she who attends secondary school (first form) at an older age could easily be construed as 'dunce' and is given a second chance, using the age factor. Such an assessment of primary level students, like the G.S.A.T in Jamaica, holds an exorbitant amount of psychological pressure for the young minds.

Whether individuals are made aware of the negative stereotypes about how they should perform in a high-stakes testing situation, a stressful environment adversely affect the success people have in solving Math problems (Beilock), which offers an explanation for the low performance of students on the mathematics paper in the G.S.A.T examination. From this research G.S.A.T is a high stake and high intensity examination and from all indications a better testing and evaluation mechanism can be designed to assess students' knowledge and understanding at this age cohort. When the former prime minister of Jamaica, Rt. Hon. Edward Seaga, entitled an article 'G.S.A.T in trouble' this speaks volume about the assessment of students at the primary level. He summarized the problem of the G.S.A.T as follows:

The consequence of the excessive homework burden falls on the parent/caregiver who either responds by giving full assistance to the student, or fails to respond, leaving the student to take on the responsibility alone [3].

The G.S.A.T is not a once-a-year problem. It is an insidious problem for the great majority of parents and caregivers, almost daily. This agitation occurs particularly with those responsible for nine and 10-year-old students approaching the dreaded G.S.A.T exams that are taken at age 11. The heavy burden of homework in preparation for G.S.A.T is occupying from two or three hours. This is a prime grievance [3].

Seaga's perspective highlights the psychological demands and burden of the G.S.A.T examination on young children. The use of the phrase 'This is a prime grievance' of the former Prime Minister of Jamaica symbolizes the psychological stress relating to the preparation for this examination as well as the psychological stereotype of expectation. "The exam is to ensure students are assigned according

to academic merit, not wealth, nor any other form of influence" said Seaga which epitomizes embedded psychological stressors of the G.S.A.T examination on young minds. Whether the parents are able to allocate some of their time to the children who are preparing for this examination, who have the desire to excel (i.e. be successful in being awarded a space in a traditional high school) places additional stress on the students.

The caption of an article written by [4] aptly speaks to the psychological pressure of the G.S.A.T, 'G.S.A.T is apartheid.' According to [4] "Describing the G.S.A.T as the "apartheid of the education system", Thwaites (Current Minister of Education) said "this high-stakes terminal examination wreaks fear and trauma among parents and children alike, all because of the perceived and the real absence of quality secondary places." Such a perspective speaks known psychological trauma experienced by students at the primary level, by the system that should protect them. While the Rt. Hon Edward Seaga and the current Minister of Education, Rt. Hon Ronald Thwaites, have forwarded their perspective of the psychological pressure of the G.S.A.T on primary level students, those positions provide an insight into a problem that warrants examination in order to make available to policy makers pertinent information upon which better decisions can be made.

Conclusion

With the psychological pressure being placed on primary school students to perform for a few 'merited' traditional high school places in Jamaica, the question which requires some examination is whether the system credits the additional stressors on students in order to award the few prized places. Clearly the psychological stress of the G.S.A.T examination is traumatizing young minds, which need to be incorporated into understanding the dismally low performance at the secondary level.

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