



Domain-specific daily hassles, anxiety, and delinquent behaviors among low-income, urban youth



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ABSTRACT

We studied contributions of domain-specific daily hassles to anxiety and delinquency prior to and during the transition into middle ($N = 186$) or high school ($N = 167$) in a sample of low-income, urban adolescents (93% African American; 54% female) using a two-wave longitudinal design. Path models controlling for baseline maladjustment and sex examined how hassles from parents, peers, academics, and the neighborhood were associated with maladjustment once youth had made the transition into a new school. Hassles with friends both prior to and during the school transition mattered for older youth's maladjustment only, whereas hassles with parents mattered for both older and younger youth. Academic hassles only appeared to be problematic for younger youth. Neighborhood hassles were associated in opposite ways with younger and older youth's maladjustment. These findings suggest that both hassle type and the timing of the school transition matter for youth maladjustment.

Daily hassles are everyday minor stressors that can be interpreted as minimally stressful, frustrating, or irritating (Kanner, Feldman, Weinberger, & Ford, 1991). Examples during adolescence include feeling that parents are being too nosy, feeling left out or alternatively pressured by peers, pressure to do well in school or struggles with school being too hard, or bothersome noise in the neighborhood (Bridley & Jordan, 2012; Kanner et al., 1991; Kliewer & Kung, 1998). A number of research groups have demonstrated that similar to more major life events, hassles are stressful for adolescents (Booth & Anthony, 2015; de Anda et al., 2000; Kanner et al., 1991; Lohman & Jarvis, 2000). Theoretically, this may be the case because hassles have a cumulative impact on youth, thereby taxing coping resources that are still developing (Kanner et al., 1991).

While school transitions – such as the transition into middle school or high school – are normative (Simmons, Burgeson, Carlton-Ford, & Blyth, 1987), they are stressful for many youth (Kingery, Erdley, & Marshall, 2011; Lohaus, Elben, Ball, & Klein-hessling, 2004; Rudolph, Lambert, Clark, & Kurlakowsky, 2001; Simmons et al., 1987). Researchers have linked these school transitions to declines in self-esteem (Blyth, Simmons, & Carlton-Ford, 1983; Eccles, Midgley, & Adler, 1984; Wigfield, Eccles, MacIver, Reuman, & Midgley, 1991), increases in depression (Rudolph et al., 2001), and increases in self-medication behavior among youth with low parental involvement

(Gottfredson & Hussong, 2011). These declines in emotional well-being may due in part to the confluence of changes experienced at some transitions. For example, in the transition from elementary to middle school, youth typically move from smaller to larger schools, have to adapt to multiple teachers and classrooms, and encounter a larger and often more diverse peer group, all the while experiencing biological, cognitive, and emotional changes (Eccles et al., 1993). In the transition from middle to high school, academic work typically is more demanding, and youth often are in larger, more diverse settings (Akos & Glassi, 2004). Further, opportunities for substance use substantially increase at this transition (Gottfredson & Hussong, 2011).

When everyday hassles are experienced in concert with school transitions, youth's experience of stress may be exacerbated due to the cumulative effect of changes to be managed and underdeveloped coping strategies. The experience of stress may present as anxiety or delinquency, particularly for low-income and ethnic minority youth who also are managing other life stressors (Attar, Guerra, & Tolan, 1994; Bell & Jenkins, 1993; Buka, Stichick, BIRTHISTLE, & Earls, 2001; Davis et al., 2014). Knowing whether and how hassles heighten low-income adolescents' vulnerability to anxiety or delinquency at times of normative school transitions would be helpful to parents, school counselors, and others involved in students' lives in facilitating student transitions into middle school or high school. This is especially true for

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low-income adolescents, because if low-income adolescents get off-track academically, it becomes even more challenging for them, relative to middle- or high-income youth, to recover (Newman, Myers, Newman, Lohman, & Smith, 2000). Ultimately, academic performance in high school is associated with earning potential in adulthood (French, Homer, Popovici, & Robins, 2015), making this a very real and not a hypothetical concern. The first purpose of the present study was to evaluate the association of hassles with anxiety and delinquency prior to and during a major normative school transition.

1. Daily hassles: the value of a domain-specific approach

Several recent studies of hassles during adolescence have demonstrated the utility of a domain-specific approach. For example, Booth and Anthony (2015) examined hassles in the family, peer, school, neighborhood, and resource domains; Sim (2000) studied hassles from parents, friends, and school. One way of categorizing these stressors is whether they occur in the context of a relationship (e.g., interactions with individuals such as family members, peers, and teachers) or are non-relational (e.g., stressors that do not at their core involve a conflict with an individual). Non-relational hassles in our study and in the work of others are contextually-based: they occur in specific locations such as neighborhoods or schools. These are contexts in which adolescents spend a significant amount of time, and based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory are "microsystems" and have the most direct influence on adolescent behavior. Booth and Anthony (2015), in a cross-sectional study with 315 low-income, diverse adolescents in grades six through eight, found that family hassles – but not hassles in other domains – were associated with delinquency. Hassles in all domains were associated, however, with substance use. In a cross-sectional study of 438 Korean adolescents, Sim (2000) found that hassles from parents, friends, and school were positively associated with depression, with the strongest associations observed for hassles from friends. In addition, hassles with parents and from school, but not from friends, were positively associated with antisocial behaviors, with the strongest associations observed for school hassles. A second purpose of the present study was to evaluate the contribution of hassles in specific domains to anxiety and delinquency in a sample of low-income, urban adolescents.

2. Daily hassles and the stress of school transitions: grade level as a moderator

Adolescence is a complex and dynamic time in which individuals may struggle with autonomy, identity, and social roles in addition to other developmental changes (Eccles et al., 1993; Slee, Campbell, & Spears, 2012). Thus, dissonance arises between the role of parents and their children during adolescence, which may exacerbate the level of hassles between parents and adolescents. Adolescent quarrels with parents are most frequent in early adolescence, peaking around age 15, and level off toward the end of high school (Brović, Keresteš, & Levpušček, 2014; Marceau, Ram, & Susman, 2014). The salience of the struggle for autonomy during early adolescence likely contributes to parent-adolescent conflict (Erikson, 1963).

Concurrent with the process of individuation from the family, adolescents increasingly are drawn to their peers. Research reveals adolescent friendships develop through their desire to obtain acceptance from groups they feel they will make them popular with their peers (Slee et al., 2012). Daily hassles specific to peers may be interpreted differently depending on the stage of development. Friendships become more intimate as adolescents mature (Trevatt, 2015), thus the capacity for conflict and rejection in relationships also increases (Selman, Jaquette, & Lavni, 1977).

Given that the timing of changes in parent-child and peer relationships differs for youth entering middle school versus high school, and the salience of specific hassles also may differ for youth transitioning into middle school versus high school, it is likely that the

experiences of youth moving from elementary to middle school will differ from the experiences of youth moving from middle to high school (Brović et al., 2014). A third purpose of the present study was to evaluate grade level as a moderator of associations between domain-specific hassles and anxiety and delinquency prior to and during a normative school transition in a low-income, urban sample.

3. The current study

Daily hassles are associated with increases in depression, anxiety, and delinquency during adolescence (Monroe, 1983; Sim, 2000; Vinkers et al., 2014) and may exacerbate the stress experienced during a normative school transition. Domain-specific approaches to the study of hassles have utility, with hassles in some domains but not others linked to maladjustment outcomes such as depression and antisocial behavior (Booth & Anthony, 2015; Sim, 2000). Developmental shifts in relationships with parents and peers suggest that the experience of hassles during the transition to middle school versus high school will differ, making the timing of the school transition an important moderator to examine. Lastly, low-income youth are more vulnerable than youth with higher incomes to stress and maladjustment (Davis et al., 2014), making them a particularly relevant group to study.

Although researchers have examined associations of domain-specific hassles with maladjustment, they have not studied this question in the context of normative school transitions, nor examined the timing of school transitions as a moderator. Further, prior research (Booth & Anthony, 2015; Sim, 2000) utilized cross-sectional designs, which precluded the ability to establish temporal precedence. We address these gaps in the present study by focusing on hassles in the family, peer, school, and neighborhood domains both prior to and during a normative school transition and follow youth for two study waves, one year apart. We include two cohorts of youth – one transitioning into middle school and one transitioning into high school – and focus on a low-income, urban sample. Controlling for prior levels of maladjustment, we anticipated that (1) hassles with friends or with parents would be positively associated with anxiety; (2) neighborhood hassles would be positively associated with delinquency; and (3) academic hassles would be positively associated with both anxiety and delinquency across the transition into middle school or high school. Due to the paucity of literature, no specific predictions were made regarding the effects of the timing of the transition for these hassles.

4. Method

4.1. Participants

Youth were recruited as part of a larger longitudinal study focused on stress and maladjustment in 358 low-income youth and parent dyads (Project COPE). For the current study, the first two waves of data, collected one year apart, were utilized. The analytic sample consisted of 353 adolescents (163 males; 91.8% African American; see Table 1 for cohort specific age, sex, and race descriptives) who were either in grade 5 ($N = 186$) or grade 8 ($N = 167$) at the start of the study (Wave 1) and who either transitioned from an elementary to a middle school or from a middle school to a high school between the first and second wave of

Table 1
Descriptive information of participants in Grade 5 and Grade 8 at Wave 1.

	Grade 5 ($n = 186$)	Grade 8 ($n = 167$)
<i>M</i> age (<i>SD</i>)	10.78 (0.63)	13.68 (0.82)
Age Range	10–12	12–16
% Male	48.4%	43.7%
% African American	91.4%	92.0%

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