

LIBERAL STUDIES

Independent Enquiry Study

Are Teenagers Too Stressed?

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Pressure has been a problem for many people for a long time. Living in a society that requires speed and quality like Hong Kong, young people are found to be feeling more stressed than before. It is quite common to see teenagers on newspapers that have great pressure but cannot ease themselves causing problems or even committing suicide. It is very sad to see these cases, but they really tell us how serious the problem is.

Everything one faces can be a source of pressure to that person. For teenagers, family, peers and academic studies are the most common areas in their daily lives that may cause pressure to them. Also, open examination is another important and special factor. It is considered outside the category of academic studies because only students of particular levels have to face this challenge and it brings extra pressure to teenagers over academic studies.

Chapter 2

Research Objectives

Based on previous discussions, we know that common sources of pressure of teenagers are family, peer, academic studies and open examination, etc. However it is only from normal thinking. In order to get a clearer image on other pressure sources, a questionnaire was conducted to find out more.

Also, the questionnaire is used to find out how teenagers react when they feel stressed, whether they seek help from others or not and how they feel afterwards.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

Review on “6 Lessons for Handling STRESS” by Christine Gorman. P.52-55, TIME. February 12, 2007.

“...take regular breaks from your normal routine - and not just an occasional weekend trip...” This is very correct and important, I think. We can never be free from pressure, so what we should do is to try to ease ourselves. If we do not have regular breaks and have one suddenly, our body may not get used to the relaxed feeling and give strange reactions like having a strong will towards working. This cannot lead to our desired effect, which is to ease us from pressure. Taking regular breaks can also avoid accumulation of pressure. This is again very healthy for us physically and psychologically.

“Some stress may be unavoidable, but these habits should help keep the damage to a minimum: breathe deeply, take a vacation, make friends, exercise regularly, eat plenty of fruits and vegetables, don't stay up late and do what you love.”

Chapter 4

Methodology

Methods provided by the author are not new ideas but very useful. They have a point in common: give a break from what we are originally focusing on. If we are afraid to be distracted away too much, simply have a deep breath will also help. When we are too concentrated on the present work, pressure comes and we may not be able to produce a good piece of work. Then it is the time for a little break. The break allows us to ease ourselves and when we go back to our work after the break, the quality of work often becomes better.

The questionnaire was set in Chinese for the convenience of the respondents. Both the original Chinese version and the translated English version of the questionnaire are available in the appendix.

The survey was conducted on the Internet instead of printing on paper. This is because of the consideration on environmental friendly and the bigger width of spread of the questionnaire.

There are not many questions because only key questions were asked. Also, a long questionnaire will decrease the interest of respondents that in turn reduces the number of answered questionnaires.

Chapter 5

Personal Information of Respondents

40 respondents answered the questionnaire. Here are the statistics of their personal information.

1. By Sex

<u>Gender</u>	<u>No. of respondents</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Male	30	75-0%
Female	10	25.0%
Total	40	100.0%

2. By Age

<u>Age</u>	<u>No. of respondents</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
<15	3	7-5%
15-18	27	67.5%
>18	10	25.0%
Total	40	100.0%

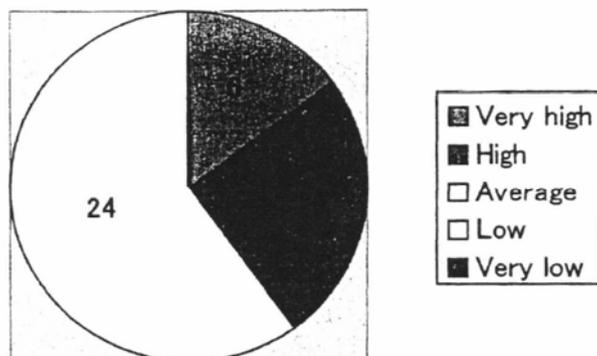
3. By Level of Study

<u>Level</u>	<u>No. of respondents</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Secondary 1-3	2	5-0%
Secondary 4-5	7	17.5%
Secondary 6-7	25	62.5%
University	2	5-0%
Other	4	10.0%
Total	40	100.0%

Chapter 6

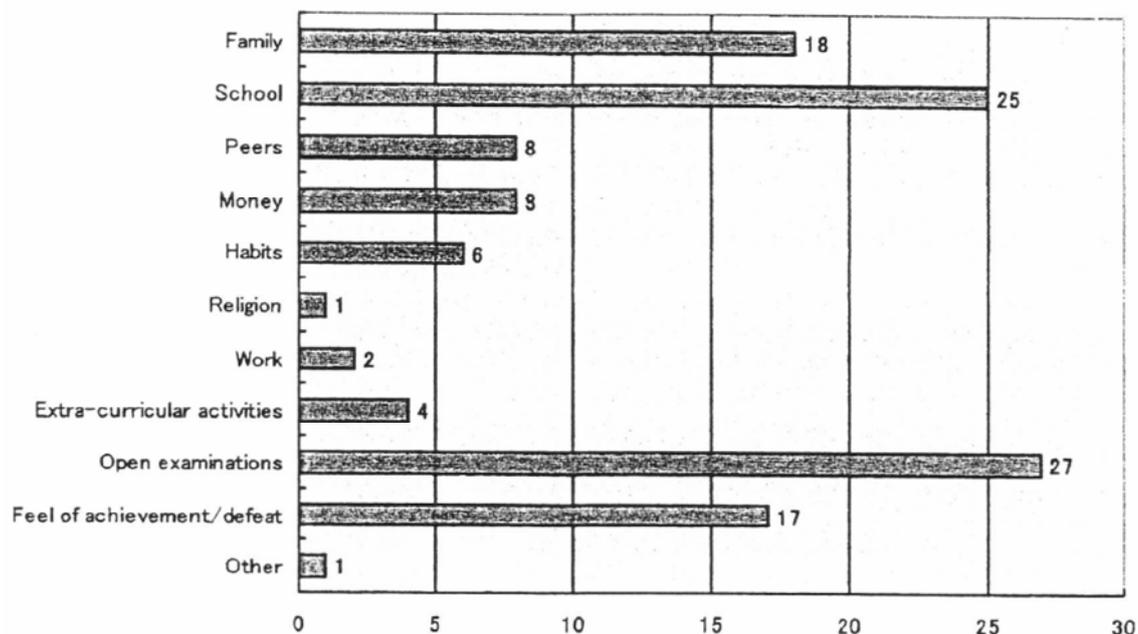
Research Results and Data Analysis

Question 4: Do you feel great pressure?



Among the respondents, no one answered “Low” and “Very low”. From this we can see that teenagers are commonly feeling a relatively high pressure. The large proportion of “Average” indicates that actually there are not many teenagers really feeling seriously stressed. The situation can be improved but is already healthier than expectation.

Question 5: What is/are your source(s) of pressure?

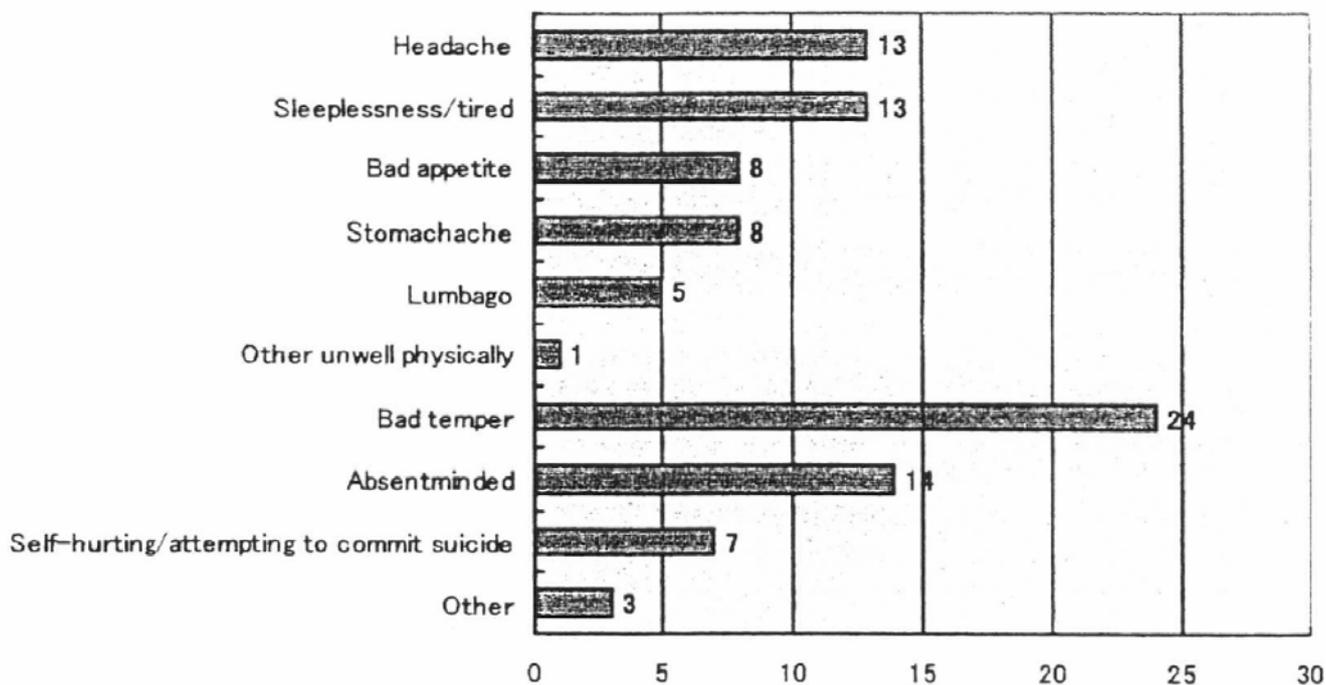


Open examinations and school are the two major sources of pressure of teenagers as shown in the questionnaire results. These are the most important things a student has to face. Under the present education system, the two main open examinations, HKCEE and HKALE, determine whether a student can proceed to the next stage of study or not. Finding a job nowadays always require a higher record of schooling. Students are always worried that he/she cannot get a Secondary 6 place after HKCEE or a university place after HKALE. If they fail to proceed to further studies, they may probably face the risk of being unemployed in the future.

Family and feel of achievement/defeat are the third and fourth major sources of teenage pressure. In some families, parents have expectations on their sons/daughters. This kind of expectation may include academic studies, daily habits, choosing friends, etc. When teenagers cannot meet the demand from their parents, they may be scolded, so they force themselves to please their parents and feel stressed.

Feeling of achievement and feeling of defeat come from competition and comparison. Not only for teenagers, but also everyone in the society, we never want to be inferior to other people but superior to them. Especially when one has been successful, he is more afraid of losing. Teenagers have many chances to compare themselves with their peers, e.g. examinations, sports competitions, etc. This is why this factor being a major source of pressure of teenagers.

Question 6: When you feel stressed, what symptom(s) do you have?



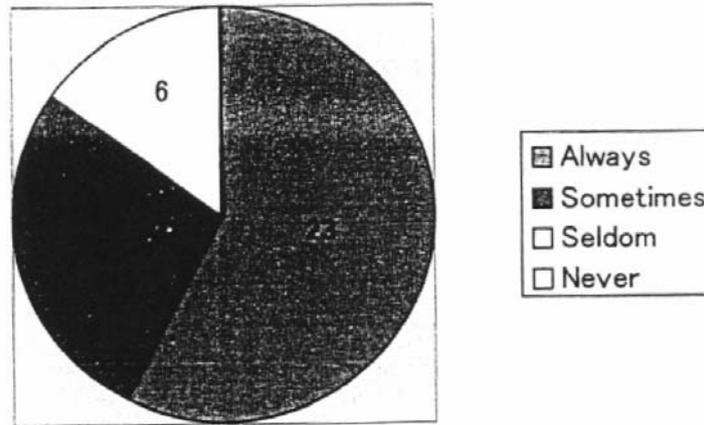
The most common symptom of teenagers when feeling stressed is having bad temper. Actually pressure is not the only source for a person to get angry, but the leading trend of having bad temper when feeling stressed is quite expectable. This is because getting angry is very easy, without the need of a specific place or condition.

Being absentminded, tired, and sleepless and having headache are quite common among teenagers as symptoms when feeling stressed. These symptoms can be grouped as “inactiveness”. When facing pressure, teenagers feel frustrated easily so they do not have as much motivation as normal. They will become inactive no matter they are absentminded, tired, sleepless or having headache.

Pressure also affects eating habits of teenagers. Some teenagers have bad appetite or stomachache when they have pressure. This is bad for teenagers, as pubertal development requires an amount of nutrients more than other periods in the lifetime. In the worst case, they may even suffer from anorexia or malnutrition.

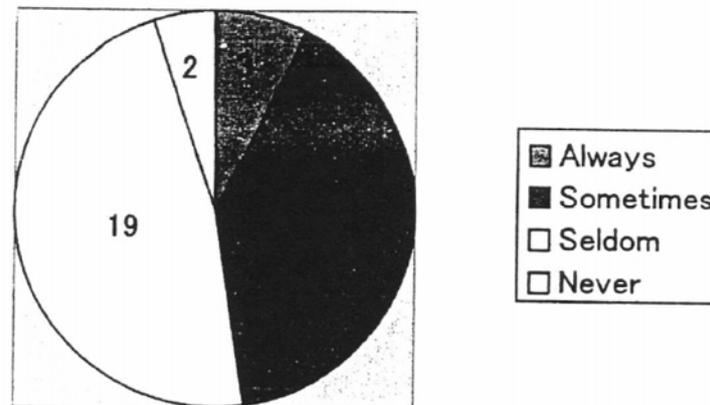
It is noticeable that the number of respondents choosing self-hurting or attempting to commit suicide is quite high (even more than the frequency of having lumbago). This is definitely an unhealthy situation since these acts do not only hurt teenagers psychologically but also mainly physically. Teenagers may lose their lives if they take this risk. Besides the teenager himself, his family members and friends will also suffer if something unfortunate really happens.

Question 7: When you feel stressed, do you try to solve the problem yourself?



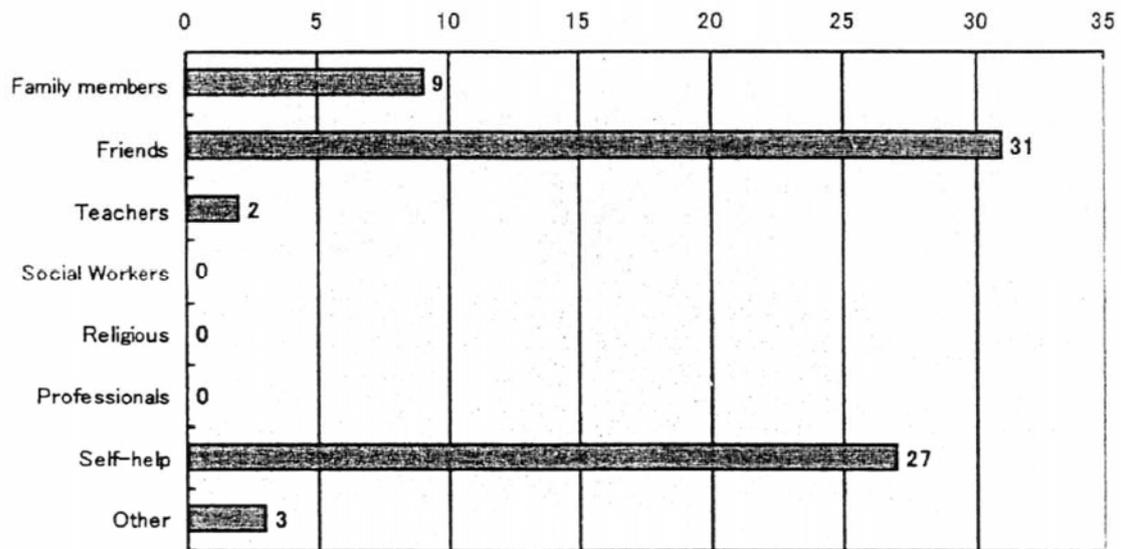
It is very obvious, from the above graph, that most teenagers try to solve the problem themselves when they feel stressed. Although the effectiveness of teenagers solving pressure-related problems themselves is uncertain, this trend is worth encouraging because it indicates that most teenagers are willing to take up their own responsibilities. They try to help themselves because they are who know themselves the best.

Question 8: When you feel stressed, do you try to seek help from other people?



Most respondents are between “Sometimes” and “Seldom” in this question. According to the majority, other people are not always involved when teenagers find themselves stressed. This is probably because of the long time consumed on talking the complete situation. Other people have to use a long time to get the details on what exactly the teenager is facing. Thinking it is very troublesome to talk to somebody else; teenagers often give up the chance of seeking help from others. Also, they may feel embarrassed when talking to other people about something very personal. This lowers the incentive of teenagers seeking help from others too.

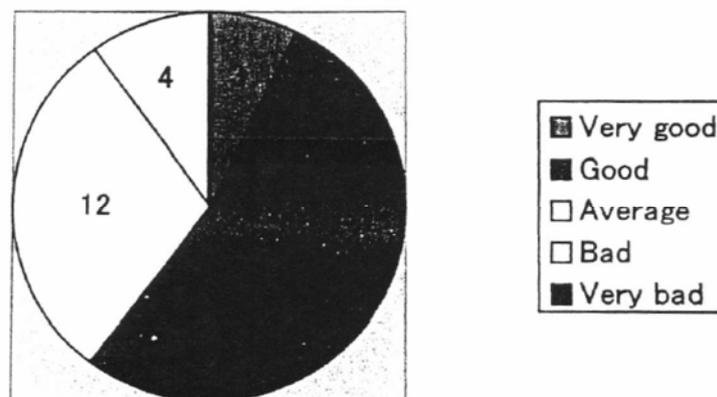
Question 9: Whom do you seek help from?



This is another question with extreme figures. Over three quarters of the respondents said they would seek help from their friends. This is understandable that they can freely talk about the pressure they face with their friends during a casual chat. The second popular choice is self-helping, whose reasons are discussed before and is not repeated here.

When considering convenience, the two choices above are simply perfect. However if we consider the effectiveness, it is funny enough that choices that should be effective, such as social workers and professionals, got nil support from the respondents.

Question 10: How do you rate the effect of the method?



Over half of the respondents said the methods they use are good. Only a few said the effects of the methods they use are bad. This response suggests that most teenagers feel happy after doing something to tackle the problem of stress. It is really a cheerful result to those people who are pessimistic on the issue of teenage pressure.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

As expected, pressure is very common among teenagers. Since vast majority of them is still studying at school, academic studies and open examinations contribute the most to causing the pressure teenagers face. This is because schoolwork affects future aspects of students very much. To have a more comfortable life afterwards, students have to work hard in school and get good grades in open examinations to get into university and in the long term a good job.

Common symptoms of teenagers under pressure include bad tempered, absentminded, headache, and sleeplessness and tired. These are expectedly common impacts on teenagers, but the relatively high proportion of respondents hurting themselves or trying to commit suicide is really alarming. This is not only unhealthy, but also even be fatal.

Teenagers like to solve problems themselves rather than seeking help from others. They can find methods that suit themselves well if they try to deal with pressure themselves. However, this may not give a whole picture of the problem since teenagers are often self-centered and thinking only for themselves. If they seek help from other people, they may get ideas from more angles of view. From the survey results, most teenagers seek help from their friends. These friends may not be professionals in psychology, but they provide an easy environment for the teenagers who suffer from pressure to share the problems they face. This may also be the reason why teenagers think it is good to share with their friends.

Chapter 8

Limitation and Ways to Improve

Because of the little promotion done, not many people answered the questionnaire. Among the respondents, most of them are Secondary 6-7 students. This cannot give a comprehensive result of the general situation of all teenagers (especially lower form students). Secondary 6-7 students face the A-Level examination so that there is a bias on the choice “Open examination” in Question 5.

Also, there is an unbalance in the gender of the respondents. The research results may not give a clear picture of how teenage girls respond when they face pressure.

These limitations can be improved by adapting better questionnaire strategies, including posting more advertisements of the online questionnaire and using printed questionnaires simultaneously, and targeting the group of lower form students and girls.

Chapter 9

Future Expectation and Suggestions

With the introduction of the new education system by the Education and Manpower Bureau, HKCEE and HKALE will not exist anymore in a few years' time. A new open examination, the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education, will replace the former two examinations and become the only open examination for secondary school students before they enter the university. This reformation may cause both positive and negative impacts on pressure on students. When considering positively, since students have to face only one open examination throughout their secondary school lives and also less subjects in the examination, their pressure can be relieved by quite a large amount. However, because the HKDSE will be the only gate in front of tertiary education, students will be very afraid of failing to get into the university after the examination. The fear against failure will increase the stress faced by students in the same time. Both situations may exist, but we cannot tell which will dominate until HKDSE appears.

The distribution in symptoms when experiencing pressure may not change much in the future. However, since teenagers nowadays are so exposed to the mass media, the frequent reports on teenagers committing suicide when they feel stressed may affect some teenagers' thoughts. The mass media should include information about counseling and stress relieving next to this kind of reports in order not to let teenage readers imitate.

It is quite surprising that no respondents said they would seek help from social workers when they feel stressed. Social workers are specialists tackling this kind of problems and they can provide professional advices for teenagers. The thing what is lacking now may be the close relationship between social workers and teenagers. They of course will not have any interactivity if neither of the parties takes the initiation. I think social workers, especially those providing service in schools, should play a more active role to approach to students and help them relieve their stress. Professional advices will definitely help students who are in need.

(Word count: 2439)

Appendix: Questionnaire Form

(a) Chinese Version

你好！本人現正就讀中六，現為通識科之專題研習報告作問卷調查。請你根據個人經歷或日常生活習慣回答本問卷之各問題，搜集所得的資料只會用於專題研習報告並絕對保密。謝謝合作！

1. 你的性別是？

- (A) 男 (B)女

2. 你的年齡是？

- (A) 15歲以下 (B) 15-18歲 (C) 18歲以上

3. 你現時就讀的年級是？

- (A) 中一至中三 (B)中四至中五 (C)中六至中七 (D)其他 (請註明_____)

4. 你感到壓力大嗎？

- (A) 非常大 (B) 大 (C) 一般 (D)小 (E) 非常小 (F) 我完全沒有壓力！

5. 你的壓力來源有?(可選多於一項)

- (A) 家庭 (B) 學校 (C) 朋友 (D) 金錢
(E) 習慣 (F) 宗教 (G) 工作 (H) 課外活動
(I) 公開考試 (J) 成就感/挫敗感 (K) 其他 (請註明)

6. 當你感到有壓力時，會有以下徵兆/行為嗎？

- (A) 頭痛 (B)失明/疲倦 (C) 食慾不振 (D) 腸胃不適 (E) 腰痠背痛
(F) 其他身軀不適 (G) 發脾氣 (H) 精神恍惚 (I) 自殘/企圖自殺
(J) 其他(請註明)

7. 當你感到有壓力時，你會嘗試自己解決嗎？

- (A) 經常 (B) 間中 (C) 很少 (D) 從不

8. 當你感到有壓力時，你會嘗試向其他人尋求協助嗎？

- (A) 經常 (B) 間中 (C) 很少 (D) 從不

9. 承上題，你會向誰求助?(可選多於一項)

- (A) 家人 (B) 朋友 (C) 老師 (D) 社工 (E) 宗教界人士
(F) 專業人士(醫生，心理學家等) (G) 自己解決 (H) 其他 (請註明_____)

10. 承上題，你覺得成效如何？

- (A)非常好 (B)好 (C)一般 (D)不好 (E)非常不好

**** 問卷已完成，謝謝閣下的合作! ****

Appendix 1: Questionnaire Form

(b) English Translated Version

Are Teenagers Too Stressed?

Hello. I am a Secondary 6 student. I am now conducting a questionnaire survey for the project of Liberal Studies. Please answer the following questions according to your past experience or daily habits. Any data collected will only be used in the project and kept absolutely confidential. Thanks for your co-operation!

1. What is your gender?

- (A) Male (B) Female

2. How old are you now?

- (A) Under 15 (B) 15-18 (C) Over 18

3. Which form are you now studying?

- (A) Secondary 1-3 (B) Secondary 4-5 (C) Secondary 6-7 (D) Other (Please specify)

4. Do you feel great pressure?

- (A) Very high (B) High (C) Average (D) Low (E) Very Low
(F) I don't have any pressure!

5. What is/are your source(s) of pressure?

- (A) Family (B) School (C) Peers (D) Money
(E) Habits (F) Religion (G) Work (H) Extra-curricular activities
(I) Open examinations (J) Feel of achievement/defeat (K) Other (Please specify)

6. When you feel stressed, what symptom(s) do you have?

- (A) Headache (B) Sleeplessness/Tired (C) Bad appetite (D) Stomachache
(E) Lumbago (F) Other unwell physically (G) Bad temper (H) Absentminded
(I) Self-hurting/Attempting to commit suicide (J) Other (Please specify)

7. When you feel stressed, do you try to solve the problem yourself?

- (A) Always (B) Sometimes (C) Seldom (D) Never

8. When you feel stressed, do you try to seek help from other people?

- (A) Always (B) Sometimes (C) Seldom (D) Never

9. Whom do you seek help from?

- (A) Family members (B) Friends (C) Teachers (D) Social workers
(E) Religious (F) Professionals (Doctor/psychologist) (G) Self-help
(H) Other (Please specify)

10. How do you rate the effect of the method?

- (A) Very good (B) Good (C) Average (D) Bad (E) Very bad

**** This is the end of the questionnaire. Thank you for your co-operation! ****

References

1. 香港健康情緒中心 Hong Kong Mood Disorder Center
<http://www.hmdc.med.cuhk.edu.hk>
2. Six Lessons for Handling STRESS by Christine Gorman, P.52-55, TIME, February 12, 2007

Project Title: Are Teenagers Too Stressed?

Self Reflection

What the most important is the process, but not the result.

This may not be a good project report in others' eyes, but is definitely an unforgettable experience for me. I have never done a project alone with such a length. Everything was fresh to me, and I once was lost about what to do.

After a long period of struggling, I got advices from my teacher advisor, Mr Peter Chan, and some classmates. I should deliver my grateful feeling to them. Watching the respondent counter rising so slowly is the most discouraging part of the whole project work. It was uneasy to convince myself to produce this report with so little data, but I realized what I can do was to finish the report as quickly as possible. I have tried my best to make the report look good.

Anyway, I must say that I really have learnt much through this project.

Marks awarded and Comments:

Title:	Are teenagers too stressed?
Stage III:	
Marks:	4-5
Comments:	This candidate is able to present the enquiry process and the findings in a fairly structured manner. There is an attempt to conduct an enquiry study with first-hand information from a survey. However, the data collected from an oversimplified questionnaire survey limit the findings and pose difficulties for the candidate to draw a meaningful and relevant conclusion.