Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology

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Doctorate in Professional Educational Child and Adolescent Psychology

Investigating the stresses children experience and the coping strategies they use

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I, Katie Sugg, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

Children are increasingly experiencing mental health issues and it is has been suggested that this is due to experiencing stress in their everyday lives. The aims of this study are to develop further insight into the stressors that younger children face, to find out the types of coping strategies children of this age use and to identify how Educational Psychologists might support pupils with learning the most effective ways to manage stress. The final aim is to consider how Educational Psychologists could support schools and parents in reducing the stresses that children experience.

This research adopts a mixed methods design to explore children's experiences of stress. Participants were pupils in year 5 and 6 across eight primary schools and one middle school in one Local Authority. The first phase consisted of the administration of a questionnaire (n=214). The second phase consisted of nine semi-structured interviews. The data from these was analysed using both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

The results from the quantitative analysis indicated that children found family stress to be more stressful than stresses relating to friendships, school work, SATs and tests and growing up pressures. Gender differences were observed, with girls reporting more stress relating to school work and friendships than boys. Quantitative results also indicated gender differences in relation to coping strategies with boys reporting playing computer games more as a way to manage stress and girls relying on social support, especially in relation to social media use. Quantitative and qualitative findings illustrated that children used a wide range of adaptive coping

strategies. However some of these were maladaptive strategies, such as avoidance and eating food, with fewer children selecting more effective problem solving approaches to coping. The implications for Educational Psychologists and schools is discussed.

Impact statement

The impact of this research, both in relation to further research and to real word issues, are outlined in this statement.

Experiencing stress in childhood is associated with an increase in mental health conditions and negative outcomes for children. Therefore, it is important to have an accurate understanding of the current stresses and pressures that children are facing on a daily basis. This information can be used to support children with learning the best ways to cope with these stressors. In addition to this, knowledge of the stressors children face can be used to reduce or mediate the stressors children experience. Currently there is a lack of research into the stresses children experience and a comprehensive way of measuring these stressors.

This research has developed a comprehensive questionnaire that is designed to capture an accurate account of the stressors that children are currently facing. The items on the questionnaire have been developed using the views of children which aims to accurately reflect the current issues children face. The questionnaire has the potential to be further developed by researchers in order for it to become a more established measure of children's stress.

Findings suggest that children are experiencing family stress as more stressful than stresses relating to friendships stress, academic stress and stresses relating to growing up. The implications for this are that schools,

parents and those who work with children, provide children with appropriate ways to learn how to manage these stressors.

At an individual level Educational Psychologists (EPs) could further explore the stress and coping strategies that individuals use by the use of the questionnaire to gain an overview of the stresses and coping strategies being used. This could support EPs and schools in identifying how best they could further support children who appear to be experiencing stresses. This may be particularly useful when children are experiencing stresses related to specific events such as SATs or peer problems. Once this information has been gained, then support with using the most suitable coping strategy may be given.

EPs could also work with individual pupils and with school staff to develop a programme to teach a range of effective coping strategies. As this research shows, although the children in this sample employed a range of coping strategies, strategies which are classed as more problem solving were used less than more emotional approaches. As evidence suggests that having a wide range of strategies helps children to manage stressors, with problem solving strategies being associated with better outcomes, teaching children a wide range may be a good starting point.

At a systemic level, this research could be used to inform policy and change or amend current educational practice. This could involve EPs, or other professionals who work with children, looking at further ways of reducing the pressures of the current primary schooling system. This could include looking at ways in which the primary education system could focus less on

achievement and outcomes based on tests results and focus on learning with

an emphasis on gaining skills and mastery.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Child mental health

As a response to concerns over child mental health there has been a recent emphasis by the government on recognising and supporting child mental health. In 2017 the government published a green paper entitled 'Transforming children and young people's mental health provision' (DoH, DfE 2017) which proposed a number of measures to support child mental health. This included the creation of a new mental health workforce, a reduction in waiting times to access child mental health services and guidance to schools in supporting mental health. In addition to this, the government commissioned a task force to set out aims to improve the care for children with mental health conditions over the next five years (Parkin, Long, Gheera & Bate, 2019).

Recent statistics suggest that 1 in 10 children and young people suffer from a mental health disorder with figures indicating that 50% of these are established before the age of 14 (DoH & DfE, 2017; Young Minds, 2016). More recent research has suggested that the prevalence of mental health conditions in children has risen to 1 in 8 children since the last national survey was conducted in 2004 (Office for National Statistics, 2017).

This increase is reflected in data from Accident and Emergency admissions which show an increase in self-harm (Chief Medical Officer report, 2012), with some figures suggesting an increase of 50% since 2010 (Thorley, 2016). Additional figures indicate that 1 in 10 children or young people self harm (Korkodilos, 2016), which reflects a 68% rise since 2002 (Young Minds

2016). Estimates, based on the information available, suggest that 850,000 children in the UK are currently diagnosed with a mental health condition (DoH & DfE, 2017). This could mean that within a class of thirty children, three children are suffering from a mental health disorder (DoH, 2015).

The most common mental health conditions affecting children and young people are conduct disorders, anxiety, depression and hyperkinetic disorder (DoH, 2015). Recent figures suggest that 2.2% of 5-10 year olds and 4.4% of 11-16 year olds suffer from clinical levels of anxiety (Korkodilos, 2016) and that 0.9% of children are severely depressed (DoH, 2015). In addition to this, 5.8% of children have a diagnosis for conduct disorder and 1.5% are diagnosed with hyperkinetic disorder (DoH, 2015). Furthermore, estimates suggest that 725,000 children have an eating disorder in the United Kingdom (Korkodilos, 2016).

1.2 Stress in childhood

The causes for these conditions are complex and multi-factorial (Thorley, 2016) with both genetic and environmental factors playing a causal role in the development of mental health conditions for children (Zubrick, Silburn, Burton & Blair, 2000). However, there is some evidence to suggest that exposure to stressful events or continual stressors can have an impact on emotional health and result in the development of a mental health condition (Thorley, 2016). Emerging evidence suggests that this increase in mental health conditions over the last five years has been partly down to the increased stressors that young people are encountering (Collishaw, Gardner,

Maughan, Scott & Pickles, 2012) such as parental mental health, poverty and changes to family structure (Thorley, 2016).

In addition to these individual stressors, recent research commissioned by teaching unions (ATL, 2016), state that teachers are seeing younger children experiencing more stress due to the current education system, which has seen an emphasis on testing and a narrowing of the curriculum. Further research carried out by the Children's Society (2016) suggests that children in the UK are finding school and the pressure associated with it difficult to manage. However, the nature of the stressors that children experience has not yet been identified by any research conducted within the UK. Furthermore, there is not any current research to indicate which stressors are regarded as more stressful than others, therefore limiting the opportunities to reduce stressors or provide children with appropriate coping strategies.

1.3 Current policy and practice

As a result of the recent guidance to schools to manage child mental health, more responsibility is being placed on schools to manage children's mental health needs (Thorley, 2016). This involves schools being able to provide mental health provision such as counselling, providing lessons that teach children about well being and promoting positive mental health and providing staff training to promote awareness of mental health in school (Parkin et al., 2019).

The guidance published for schools 'Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools' (DfE, 2018) emphasises the importance of preventative work to

promote positive mental health in children, including developing a supportive and caring school environment and promoting resilience in children. In addition to this, schools are being advised to provide closer monitoring for pupils with mental health issues and to make referrals to appropriate agencies quickly.

However, concerns have been expressed that government policy does not go far enough and that these reforms are not adequate to address children's mental health needs (British Psychological Society, 2018). Criticisms of the government's green paper are that it neglects prevention and early intervention, puts too much emphasis on school staff to promote mental health, neglecting the role of other professionals, and ignores the wider political and social influences on mental health (British Psychological Society, 2018). Furthermore, teachers and Headteachers have expressed concerns about having the training and resources to deliver mental health support in school without extra funding or resources. Another criticism is that this guidance focuses on mental health conditions in children and does not help to identify and support children with learning to cope with the typical stresses and strains that they face in day to day life.

1.4 Researcher's background and interest

The researcher's interest in this area originates from concerns over child mental health and the increase of children experiencing mental health conditions from previous work as a primary school teacher in a mainstream setting. During the researcher's thirteen years teaching in three primary schools in outer London and within a Local Authority in the South East of

England, there appeared to be more children who were experiencing mental health conditions such as anxiety and self-harm. As a class teacher, the researcher noted that referrals to services were increasing and more children were displaying significant mental health concerns.

During the role as a Trainee Educational Psychologist, the researcher noted that many SENCos were raising concerns about the number of children presenting with mental health needs, including anxiety, depression, conduct problems and self-harm. This led to the researcher becoming interested in the possible reasons behind this which led to this exploratory study to further explore this.

2 Literature Review

In order to gain an understanding of the previous research on children's experiences of stress and coping, a review of the literature was conducted. This was carried out using educational and psychological databases including PSYCH articles, the British Education Index and searches generated from using the UCL Explore database. In addition to this, references were followed up from the articles that had been generated in the original searches.

As there is emerging evidence that children are experiencing stress in a range of different contexts (Collishaw, et al., 2012; The Children's Society 2016) and even from recent changes to the schooling system, the search of the literature aimed to examine all the different levels of stress that children may face. This included stressors related to school, within the home and at a wider level such as experiencing stress from social media and increased pressures of the schooling system. In addition to this, individual characteristics of the child were considered in relation to how children select and use appropriate coping strategies to cope with these stressors.

This model of research is therefore informed by Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological theory (2005) and this review will explore the literature through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological theory (2005). Bronfenbrenner's theory will be first outlined and then a wider review of the literature on children's stress will be discussed.

2.1 Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Theory of Human Development

2.1.1 Introduction to Bronfenbrenner's original theory

Bronfenbrenner's original theory, The Ecology of Human Development, was first proposed in the 1970s. It focused on understanding the context and environment that the child operated within, something that previous psychological research had ignored (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). The theory described the interrelations between the different systems that the person being studied operated within.

These systems are:

- the microsystem: a setting where the person can engage in face to face interaction; this could be the home, school or playground;
- the mesosystem: this comprises of the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person participates in;
- the exosystem: this involves a setting in which the developing person is not directly part of but which may exert an influence on the young person, for example the parent's place of work or parent's wider social network;
- the macrosystem: this refers to the form the systems take in response to the culture and social influences of the society in which they operate in.

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Bronfenbrenner's original model emphasised the importance of the interrelatedness of each system and how people's experiences are

influenced not only by their immediate setting but those which operate around it (Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

During the 1980s, Bronfenbrenner's model was developed with greater attention being paid to the role played by the individual and issues relating to the passage of time (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Bronfenbrenner's ecological paradigm viewed development as a function of the interactions between the person and the individuals they had interactions with over the passage of time (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). This included paying attention to individual characteristics which may have an impact on how the person's characteristics discouraged or encouraged these interactions with the environment (Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

2.1.2 Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Theory of Human Development

The development of Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Theory of Human Development (2005) emphasises the role of proximal processes which are regarded as a powerful influence on human development (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Proximal processes relate to reciprocal interactions that take place between the developing person and the people, objects, and symbols within their immediate environment (Rosa & Tudge, 2013) such as the interactions between a child and their teacher within the mesosystem (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). In addition to this, the Bio-ecological Theory of Human Development emphasises the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model which examines the influence of proximal processes on human development in relation to the person, the context in which the proximal processes occur and the time period during which this takes place (Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

Bronfenbrenner's framework has been critiqued for not paying enough attention to the specific characteristics of the individual and their individual environments. Furthermore, there have been criticisms that his theory does not take into account differences in individual's responses to their environment, one aspect being in relation to resilience (Christensen, 2010). This criticism states that Bronfenbrenner's model only considers the negative impact that individuals experience in relation to adversity and does not consider how individuals who experience adversity can become successful (Christensen, 2010).

2.1.3 How this theory can be applied to stress research in childhood

Bronfenbrenner's framework has been widely applied to Educational Psychology (EP) research and child development as it takes into account the external influences which operate around the child and how wider influences, such as government policy or social change, can have an influence on child development (Costelloe, 2018). Furthermore, this framework enables EP research to consider how implications for EP practice can be related to the different levels and systems that EPs work within.

The rationale for using Bronfenbrenner's theoretical framework for this research is that it takes into account how the wider influences, such as changes to school systems and curriculum, may be having an impact on the stressors that children encounter. An overview of these will be discussed at the end of this chapter. It also takes into account how the individual child's characteristics may have an impact on how they appraise and manage

stress. This relates well to the transactional model of stress discussed later in this chapter.

2.2 Definition of stress

The concept of stress has both physical and psychological meaning (Chandler, 1981). Stress is typically defined as a response to adverse or demanding external stimuli from the environment (Compas, 1987) that requires a physiological or psychological adjustment in response to this stimulus (Matheny, Aycock & McCarthy, 1993). Therefore, the different environments in which the individual experiences can have an impact on the stressors they encounter. This highlights how understanding how the context and environment in which the child operates within can have an impact on their psychological wellbeing, something which Bronfenbrenner's model takes account of (Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

Experiencing stress is a natural part of living (Chandler, 1981) and humans are presented with a range of threatening and challenging situations from birth and learning to cope with this stress is a key aspect of human development (Compas,1987). However, continual or excessive exposure to stress can have damaging consequences (Chandler, 1981).

2.3 Different models of stress

2.3.1 Transactional model of stress

One of the most influential models of stress has been Lazarus and Folkman's transactional theory which explains why some external stimuli produce a stress response and why what is appraised as stressful by one person and

not by another (Lazarus & Folkman,1984). This model focuses on the individual's appraisal of the stressor rather than exposure to stressors from the environment in which the individual inhabits.

In order to interpret a situation as stressful or not, a person appraises the situation using the process termed 'cognitive appraisal'. Cognitive appraisal is the subjective interpretation made by an individual to stimuli in the environment. This process consists of two phases: primary appraisal and secondary appraisal. During the first phase, the person evaluates whether they have anything to lose from that encounter.

During this process, the person evaluates whether the stimuli represent a threat or a challenge; this is dependent on the person's prior experience of the stimuli, personal characteristics and the person's resources to enable them to cope with the stimuli.

During the second phase, the person evaluates what if anything can be done to overcome or prevent harm or to improve the prospects of the situation. This can be dependent on their coping strategies, resources and the perceived skills they have to manage the situation. Following this, if the stimuli is viewed as a stressor, then the impact of this could be mediated by the person's coping style or resources. Lazarus and Folkman recognised that appraisal and coping were interlinked as the person's perception of whether they could cope with the stimuli would impact on whether they would perceive this as stressful or not in the first place. Coping can also be influenced by situational or environmental factors as well as personal beliefs in being able to deploy a helpful coping strategy. Environmental factors could

be access to social support or the ability to control or change the stressor in some way. Therefore, a stress response is experienced when the demands of the stressor outweigh the perceived resources to cope with this (Lazarus & Folkman,1984) which is determined by the individual during the process of cognitive appraisal.

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) theory draws upon the importance of personal characteristics and coping. They suggest that stress can be perceived as a normal part of life, but it is coping that makes a difference to how individuals manage the stressors they encounter. In further development of their theory, Lazarus and Folkman (1987) considered the interaction and relationship between the person and their environment. This extended their original theory which had considered environmental influences (stresses) and personal characteristics as separate. In their later writing, they considered how personal characteristics, such as anxiety or temperament, could influence or mediate different environmental stressors and how different environmental stresses could cause different reactions and coping mechanisms to be utilised in different individuals (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987).

In relation to Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological theory of human development, children's exposure to stressful events, their appraisal and coping can be dependent upon the different microsystems that children encounter such as being part of a supportive school environment or within a family that teaches or models appropriate coping skills and strategies. Personal characteristics, such as resilience or being sociable and accessing the support of others, can have an influence on how an event is appraised and the way in which such an event is appraised.

One criticism of this model is that it does not relate to children and how they perceive and manage stress (Grant et al., 2003) and the developmental aspects of appraising and managing stress (Sotardi, 2017).

2.3.2 Developmental models of stress for childhood

More recently, other models of stress and coping have been proposed making more specific reference to children's responses to stress and coping. This is in response to research suggesting that children's cognitive appraisal of stimuli is a developmental process, something which adult models do not account for (Grant et al., 2003). As children's cognitive processes develop, this can have an impact on how they perceive the event and the way in which they cope with this stressor, which can further impact on how stressful the event is perceived as (Fernandez-Baena, Traines, Escobar, Blanca, & Munoz, 2015). Middle childhood is a time where children move from pre-operational to concrete operational stages of cognitive development. This may mean that children of this age, may view stressful events from an egocentric point of view, whereby they may fail to realise that other children may experience the stressor in different ways (Sotardi, 2017). Additionally, they may perceive events from a more intuitive emotional response to the situation as opposed to appraising the situation from a more cognitive perspective (Sotardi, 2017). This can have an impact on both how stressful a situation is perceived to be and the resources available to cope with this stressor (Sotardi, 2107).

Other mediating factors, such as parental or peer support, also change during childhood which can make applying a transactional model of stress to children problematic (Grant et al., 2003). Grant et al. (2003) suggest that when working with children and stress, a stimulus-response approach should be used, similar to the original approach taken by Holmes and Rahe (1967). Grant et al. (2003) suggest that this approach is used when measuring stressors in childhood.

2.3.3 The current research

In this current research both models of stress are considered. Children were asked to state whether they have experienced a stressor or not and then rate how stressful they appraised this as. This takes into account the developmental aspect of stress research in determining whether the stressor has been experienced or not yet also takes into account the child's appraisal of how stressful the event is perceived as.

2.3.4 Different types of stress:

Traditionally research on stress in adults focused on the impact of severe and usually infrequent life events, such as the death of a loved one or divorce, on the psychological health of those who had experienced such events (Wagner, Compas, & Howell, 1988). However, more recently the focus has been on the impact of more frequent, smaller stressors often termed "daily hassles" (Wagner et al., 1988). Studies have shown that the experience of daily life stressors has more of an impact on the psychological health of a person than the experience of a major life event (Band & Weisz, 1988; Wagner et al., 1988). Further research by Wagner et al. (1988) found

that there was an indirect link between major events and psychological symptoms as major events often led to an increase in the daily stresses that led to increased psychological symptoms.

This relates to Bronfenbrenner's framework as it highlights the interaction between the different settings which individuals engage in and how the stresses which happen in one area can have an impact in other situations. The cumulative effect of stress in different areas can have an impact on the resources and coping strategies available to the individual. In addition to this, wider influences can have an impact on the individual such as parents experiencing stress in the workplace, which means they have less time or resources to support their child with any difficulties they may be experiencing at home or school. Furthermore, changes to the schooling system or curriculum could result in a more pressurised school environment, with children experiencing more pressure to do well and achieve a certain grade. These external pressures may be more likely to result in more daily hassles type of stress than a traumatic one off event. Other external events due to changes in society, such as austerity measures or poverty, may also result in children encountering more daily hassles type stresses, such a parents working longer hours and concerns over financial worries.

2.3.5 Positive impact of stress:

Experiencing some levels of stress, both for children and adults, can be helpful and improve mental functioning, allowing people to meet the external demands placed upon them (Crum, Salovey, & Achor, 2013). Stress can enable people to focus the resources they have on the task and in some

instances improve effective working (Crum et al., 2013). In childhood, experiencing good stress can have positive developmental outcomes as children learn how to cope and manage their stress (Thompson, 2014). In order for stress to be helpful in learning how to cope, it needs to be of a mild to moderate level (in relation to the child's ability to cope), be predictable and of a short duration (Thompson, 2014). However, experiencing ongoing, cumulative stress has been linked with negative outcomes for children (Compas et al., 2017).

2.4 Research into Childhood stress:

2.4.1 Daily Hassles

Until relatively recently, it was presumed that childhood was a time that was free from stress (Beaver, 1997). In line with the research into adult stress, much of the early research into childhood stress focused on major life events such as a bereavement of a parent or experiencing childhood illness. However, reflecting adult research into stress, research began to focus on the cumulative experience of everyday stress over the experience of less frequent major events. These less frequent stressors are often termed "daily hassles". (Grant, et al., 2003) and can include events such as not being chosen for a school team or experiencing difficulties in school (Grant et al., 2003).

This shift in focus was partly driven by research which suggested that exposure to ongoing daily stressors as associated with negative outcomes including both mental and physical illness (Byrne et al., 2011). Furthermore, research into in childhood stress began to focus on non-clinical samples to

explore the everyday stresses which children face rather than focusing on children who have experienced severe trauma (Byrne et al., 2011).

As the shift from examining major life events began to move towards looking at the daily hassles stressors that children experienced in their daily lives, researchers began to explore the perspectives of the children. This began to draw upon the theory that psychological stress is often perceived differently by different individuals and how what is regarded as stressful by one person may be seen as a challenge by another (Blom et al., 1986). Following this shift, a range of scales examining children's views on stress were developed (Colton, 1985: Yamamoto & Davis, 1982). Some of these earlier scales are now considered to be outdated and the items included deemed irrelevant to the stresses of children today (Byrne et al., 2011), In addition to this, some of the earlier scales have methodological flaws such as having small and unrepresentative samples or having too many items for younger children to fully attend to (Byrne et al., 2011).

More recent research has aimed to overcome these earlier difficulties, including research by Byrne et al. (2011), Escobar et al., 2013 and Sotardi (2016). These include the Child's Stress Questionnaire (CSQ) (Byrne et al., 2011), the Children's Daily Stress Inventory (Escobar et al., 2013) and the Stress -O- Meter (Sotardi, 2016).

One such study was the development of the CSQ (Byrne et al., 2011) which collated previous items from stress questionnaires and then after modification by researchers presented them to children to complete to determine how relevant these stressor items were. This was then followed up

12 months later. This study revealed further insights as to what children found stressful. One finding was that the experience of daily hassles was deemed as more stressful (because they are experienced more frequently) than major life stresses. Daily stressors included children's relationships with their parents, transition periods and problems with peers (Byrne et al., 2011). Whilst this study gained the views of a large sample of children (821 children for the first administration of the questionnaire) enabling the authors to report the stressors children encountered in their daily lives, children were not directly consulted in the development of the initial items (Byrne et al., 2011) therefore perhaps limiting the possibility of unexpected stressors being identified.

This study reflects the stresses the children experienced within the different microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) in which they were part of, namely the family, the school playground or social situations with their peers. In this study the children did not appear to be overly stressed in relation to school and school work. By having an understanding of the settings in which children experience stress, more targeted support can be considered. This study did not consider how the interactions between the different microsystems interacted or the wider issues impacting on this. However, it may be helpful to consider the wider issues such as the education system in Australia which may have had an influence on why the children experienced less stress than perhaps children in the UK.

In relation to the construction of the CSQ, social and cultural influences impact on the items constructed and the relevance of these items to the children involved (Byrne et al., 2011), a point which the authors comment on

regarding the construction of their questionnaire compared to older models which may no longer be applicable to children today. This reflects how the influences of the macrosystem can filter down into the daily lives of individuals and impact on the stresses which children experience.

In relation to the development of the items constituting the CSQ, recognition of the different microsystems in which the children participate in is required. As the authors state, the principle environments in which children occupy were used to construct the questionnaire: the family, the peer group environment and school. It is possible that there would be a connection between the different stressors experienced within the different microsystems that the children inhabit yet this was not further explored here. Following this, relevant items for each setting were then devised.

As research began to highlight the negative impact of daily stressors in childhood (Escobar et al., 2013), further research was conducted into the nature of these stressors. Escobar et al. (2013) investigated the impact of daily stress on a sample of 6078 primary school students in Spain. A self-report measure was used, the Children's Daily Stress Inventory, which consisted of 22 items, across three domains of stress: health, school and family. This reflects the different microsystems in which the children were part of and engaged in and the potential stressors they may encounter within each setting.

 These results highlighted that younger children (6-12 years) experienced higher levels of stress than adolescents and that the nature of stressors changed from childhood into adolescence. In this study the 6-12 year age

group experienced higher levels of stressors relating to school, family and health. Whereas in adolescence, academic achievement, romantic attachments and conflicts between leisure and academic demands were cited as sources of stress. These findings suggest that as children get older, the competing demands of two microsystems may be a cause of stress. The competing demands between home, school and peers could potentially be cause of stress for some children, particularly where the different microsystems may have different values or required behaviours, for example parents exerting pressure on academic performance whereas friends valuing having fun or leisure activities. However the study gives little detail as to how the inventory was devised and the nature of the stressors children face are not reported. This gives limited insight into the exact nature of childhood stress in this sample of children.

Research into children and stress began to recognise that younger children experience stress. Sotardi (2016) investigated elementary school aged pupils experience of stress. In the past research ignored schooling as a source of stress for children (Skinner & Wellborn, 1997), especially in the primary years, as adults perceived this to be a relatively stress free time in children's lives (Sotardi, 2016), whereas children often found school based problems to be stressful. The sample consisted of 65 students aged between 7-11 years old from a large school in the south-west of the United States. The Stress-O-Meter measure was used where open ended questions encouraged children to report the events they had found stressful within the last day. Students completed one of these every afternoon for eight weeks. Coping style was also examined using individual interviews.

The results showed that children experienced stress within the school day and examples given were frustration and fatigue with the everyday learning environment, feeling under pressure to constantly change tasks and demands, interpersonal relationships and pressure to learn things under time constraints. Other more subtle concerns arose from the data, such as children often experiencing stresses from two different areas within the same day. This relates to Bronfenbrenner's model whereby the experiences in one microsystem can impact on the other (mesosystem). A limitation of this research is that the validity of the Stress-O-Meter has not been examined with larger samples (Sotardi, 2016). A further limitation is the small sample size and the low response rate of participants, which can limit the generalisability of these findings to the wider population being studied (Robson, 2002).

Sotardi (2016) recognised the different microsystems in which children of this age group experience stress which include school work and social situations. The findings from this study show that children found academic pressure to be stressful which contradicts findings such as those of Byrne et al., (2011). Whilst this could be due to multiple factors, one reason could be the influences of wider pressure of the schooling system in the United States or they ways in which children are taught or supported to manage stress in their everyday lives by parents and school.

More recently (2015), Fernandez-Baena et al. investigated the prevalence of daily stressors in 7,354 6-13 year olds in Spain. In their study, children aged between 6-13 years old, completed the Children's Daily Stressors Inventory, which consists of 22 dichotomous items relating to every day stressors

relating to three areas: health, family and school. Items included situations such as: having to go to the doctor; finding school work difficult and other children picking on them at school. Their study reported relatively low levels of stress within the sample with 68% of the respondents' total score being classified as having no stress; 23% within the mild stress category and 8.7% with the severe stress category. However, as the study does not state the timeframe the children were asked to report in (for example whether they had experienced stress within the last week or month) it is difficult to determine whether this represents a one off point of experiencing stress or whether this is over a longer period of time.

Their findings also showed that older children (those in years 5 and 6) experienced lower levels of stress than those in years 1-4. As stated by the authors, this could be due to the older children having learnt how to cope with the stressors which they face on a daily basis, having gained more experience and skills with coping with these stressors as they progressed through the primary school years. The authors also stated that as children of this age approach adolescence, they may begin to experience a different range of issues, such as peer and romantic difficulties, which may not have been reflected in the inventory on childhood stress which they used.

Unlike other research into childhood stress, this study explored whether certain children reported higher levels of stress than others. Children were grouped into categories, determined by their teachers' response to the Observation Scale for teachers. The scale's four categories are aggression, inhibition, sociability and leadership; and pupils were assigned to one of these four categories. The results showed that children who were assigned

to the aggressive category experienced higher levels of stress than the other groups. Those who were categorised in the leadership and sociability groups experienced less stress than those in the inhibited and aggressive group. This reflects how the individual characteristics of a child can have an impact on both how they may perceive an event and the way in which they behave in certain situations. There is also the possibility that children who experience higher levels of stress, respond to events in different ways, for example by being aggressive or perceiving more situations as a threat and responding as such.

Alongside the development of scales to measure stress, other research has been conducted to seek children's views on their experiences of stress. In a study by Brobeck, Marklund, Haraldsson and Berntsson (2007), semi-structured interviews were used to explore the perceptions of stress in a sample of 29 children aged 11-12 years old. The findings grouped the stressors children faced into five themes: not having sufficient time to do things, physical and mental consequences of experiencing stress, experiencing the stress of others, viewing stress as a positive and negative experience. However, some of these themes were associated more as the consequences of suffering from stress, such as physical consequences of stress, and do not relate directly to the stressors children face. Therefore, whilst this study focused on gaining children's views and describing their lived experience of stress using a phenomenological approach (Brobeck et al., 2007), it did not provide a clear description of the nature of the stressors the children faced. Furthermore, the sample size was relatively small with an uneven ratio of boys to girls (18 girls and 11 boys) which may have had an

impact on the results as some research suggests that girls are more affected by the impact of stress than boys. In addition to this, the sample here was from a small town in Sweden, so the issues which they face may not be applicable to that which children in the UK are currently facing.

Within the UK, there has been limited research into exploring the stressors children face. One study by Valentine, Buchanan & Knibb (2009) asked 50 children aged 4-11 years old about their experiences of stress. This study used semi-structured interviews to find out about children's understanding of what stress means and in what way they experienced stress. Their findings reported that 72% of the children had experience of stress and that 77% of children within the eight-nine age group had direct experience of feeling stressed. However, the authors did not report what the stressors experienced were and results were presented as percentages of how many children experienced stress and whether this was direct or indirect experience. Therefore, whilst indicating that children in this age group experience stress, the impact of this research is limited in reporting what these stressors are.

2.5 Coping and coping strategies

Coping is defined as a process of responding to stress (Compas et al., 2017) with the aim of mediating the distress that the stressor is causing to the person involved (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). Coping is a controlled, effortful process that requires conscious and purposeful thoughts and actions in order to manage the response to the stressor (Compas et al., 2017). There have been multiple systems to categorise and organise coping (Zimmer-Gembeck, Lees, & Skinner, 2011) especially in relation to childhood coping

mechanisms. These are discussed below before discussing the effectiveness of different styles of coping and how this can support children in school with managing the stressors they experience.

2.5.1 Different models of coping

Two models of coping have been widely referred to in the literature on coping. Lazarus and Folkman's (1987) model on coping emphasises the role of cognitive appraisal of the stressor which determines whether the stimuli poses a threat or challenge to the individual. Their model encompassed two dimensions of coping: problem solving focused coping (efforts to resolve the source of the stress) and emotional focused coping (efforts to manage one's own emotional response to the stress). Problem solving strategies include seeking further information, taking action to reduce or mediate the stress or changing the circumstances relating to the stress. Emotional approaches include seeking the support of others, talking about feelings or avoiding/escaping the source of the stress.

This model has been criticised as being too simplistic a representation of what happens during coping with criticisms being the two factor approach to coping is too broad to fully capture the differences between coping styles within each category (Compas, Connor-Smith, Saltzman, Harding Thomsen & Wadsworth, 2001). Furthermore, it does not account for some of the overlap between the different approaches used, for example problem solving approaches can have an emotional element to them and the complexity of this is not examined in this model (Compas et al., 2001).

Another approach to coping by Compas et al. (2017), conceptualises coping as a control based model comprising of three components: primary control coping which attempts to manage the source of the stress or one's own emotional response to the stressor including emotional expression; secondary control coping which includes efforts to adapt the source of the stress including acceptance and cognitive appraisal. The third component is disengagement coping which includes avoidance (efforts to orient away from the source of the stressor both in terms of behaviour and emotionally), denial and wishful thinking.

In relation to childhood coping, it is important to consider the developmental nature of coping (Zimmer-Gembeck & Skinner, 2011). Evidence suggests that coping in middle childhood becomes more sophisticated and represents a transition from relying on support from others to using a wider range of strategies, as children begin to utilise more cognitive appraisal approaches and behavioural strategies such as avoidance or distraction. In a review of the coping literature on childhood, Zimmer-Gembeck and Skinner (2011) found that children of this age group began to use cognitive strategies such as complex distraction techniques and were able to focus on the positives of a stressful situation. Whilst children of this age still relied on their parents for support seeking, they began to seek support from other sources such as teachers and peers, often seeking support from different sources in relation to the situation. This may reflect children's cognitive development as they are more able to take on the views of others and recognise who may be best to support in certain situations. Maladaptive strategies, such as escape, decline in middle childhood.

2.5.2 The importance of coping

Exposure to stress in childhood is associated with poorer outcomes and potential mental health conditions (Compas et al., 2001). The ability to cope with these stressors has been shown to mediate the effects of stress on childhood and promote better longer term outcomes for children (Compas et al., 2001). However, research into childhood coping has often failed to identify the most adaptive coping strategies for children to use when learning to manage everyday stressors (Compas et al., 2001).

Coping refers not only to successful efforts to manage the stress but also to those which are unhelpful or maladaptive (Compas, 1987). Therefore, it is important to know which styles of coping are helpful to manage stress for children of this age group and encourage children to select more adaptive strategies when coping with stress in order to mediate the negative impact stress can have on child development (Compas et al., 2001).

Traditionally research focused on the two broad areas of problem solving and emotional approaches of coping. Research suggested that problem solving coping appeared to have better outcomes for children whereas the use of an emotional approach has been related to higher levels of behaviour problems and anxiety and depression in later life (Compas, et al., 2001). However, some evidence suggests that problem solving approaches may only be more effective when used in situations that are perceived as being more controllable and emotional approaches are more effective when the situation is perceived as less controllable (Band & Weisz, 1998; Sandstrom, 2011). This may be particularly pertinent to children's management of stress

as children can often lack control over the stressors they experience or the actions they can take to change these stressors.

Whilst further research is still needed to determine the most effective strategies for children's coping, it has been found that problem focused approaches have better outcomes for those stressors which are controllable whereas emotional approaches are associated with better outcomes for uncontrollable stressors (Hempel & Petermann, 2005). Furthermore, research suggests that children who are able to use a range of coping strategies effectively and flexibly are better able to cope to cope with stressors (Sotardi, 2017). Therefore, it is important that teachers, parents and educators, including EPs, help children to develop a range of effective coping strategies that can be used when dealing with a wide range of stressors.

2.5.3 Research into Children's strategies for coping

As with research on stress, research on children's coping strategies asked children to select from predefined categories and rate how frequently they use them. Some research has attempted to explore children's coping but with older students. Henderson and Dickey (1998) asked 207 middle school students to state what they found stressful and the coping strategy they used. In an open ended questionnaire students were asked to respond to the question 'When these things worry you, how do you make yourself feel better?'. Coping strategies were then collated and allocated to one of eight categories. The most reported category was 'distraction' suggesting that this was the predominant coping style in this sample of students. However, it is

not reported how children distract themselves and their rationale for this as the quantitative reporting of the results does not give full insight into the responses the children gave.

In order to explore younger children's coping strategies, research by Beaver (1997) presented children with hypothetical scenarios which asked how the character would respond. This approach was used to overcome the issue of children reliably remembering how they have coped with stressful situations. The focus of this research was on the role of emotion in the selection of a coping style to explore whether the emotion the child associated with the event presented had an impact on the coping style selected. The findings suggested that different emotional responses were associated with the selection of a certain coping strategy, for example if the child felt fear at the response of the stressor, they would be more likely to inhibit their actions (not use an active coping strategy). This approach has its limitations as children may respond differently in a real life situation than a hypothetical scenario, especially as the scenario concerned a peer and not themselves (Harrison & Murray, 2014).

More recent attempts to gain children's views on how they cope in stressful situations has started to expand on the methods used for a self report measure for children (Harrison & Murray, 2014; Wright, 2010). Harrison and Murray (2014) asked 101 4-6 year olds about how they coped with the transition to school. Using individual interviews at two time points children were asked to respond to the situations using the Pictorial Measure of School Stress and Wellbeing (PMSSW). Their responses were then allocated to two categories: constructive solutions or reliance on school

rules. If the child did not respond it was coded as a passive response. The results indicated that most children's responses were allocated to the reliance on school rules, which the authors suggest is the predominant category for young children but as they progress through the school year they begin to be more pro-active in their coping strategies, for example asking a peer or teacher for help. In line with other studies children tended to use passive or emotional coping responses for problems for which they felt they could not control.

2.6 Bio-Ecological influences on children's stress and coping

This section examines the influences on children's stress and coping, using Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological model as a framework for considering the different levels of influence on stress and coping.

2.6.1 Micro systemic influences on stress and coping

At the microsystemic level, personal characteristics at the individual level such as resiliency (O'Dougherty Wright & Masten 2006), gender (Washburn-Ormachea, Hillman, & Sawilowsky, 2004) and temperament (Power, 2014) may have an impact on how individuals perceive events as stressful and the coping mechanisms they use. In addition to this, the pressures associated within the immediate environment may exert different stressors on the individual.

Personal characteristics:

Previous research has found that girls perceive more frequent and intense stress and have different coping styles to boys (Compas, 1987). In a study to

explore the gender differences between adolescent boys and girls'
perceptions of coping, Washburn-Ormachea, Hillman and Sawilowsky (2004)
found that girls experienced and reported more stresses relating to peers
and interpersonal relationships than boys. Differences in how individuals
perceive stress may influence the coping style they select and the
effectiveness of the coping style can mediate the impact of the stressor.

Further characteristics such as an individual's resilience or temperament
have also been shown to impact on how stresses are perceived and the
coping style selected (O'Dougherty Wright & Masten 2006). Resilience
relates to individuals who experience success despite experiencing adverse
conditions such as poverty, neglect or maltreatment (O'Dougherty Wright &
Masten 2006). Research suggests that those who are more resilient perceive
and manage stresses more effectively than those who are termed less
resilient (Compas et al., 2017).

Environmental pressures

Microsystemic pressures could relate to the child's school, family, and
neighbourhood. Previous research has shown that children of this age group
experience stress in relation to school and other academic pressures
(Sotardi, 2017), with family and peer related stress also being common
stressors.

At the same time, some research has indicated that stress related to school
is causing higher levels of anxiety and stress in children than ever before
(Putwain, 2008).

2.6.2 Mesosystemic influences on stress and coping

Mesosystemic influences relate to the interactions, or proximal processes, that occur between the different microsystems that surround the child (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). This includes processes such as supportive school and home environments and the ways in which family and school support can help to mediate the stresses experienced.

Family

Family support is a protective factor for exposure to childhood stress (Power, 2004). Research suggests that parental support can influence children at each stage of the stress and coping process, from the exposure to potential stressful events, appraisal of the event and lastly, the coping process (Power, 2004). Whilst exposure to all stressors cannot be controlled, there is some evidence to suggest that parental influence can manage exposure to stressors such as media use, difficult peer interactions as well as protect children from the influence from some stressors that cannot be controlled (e.g. withholding details about worrying financial difficulties). At the appraisal stage, parents can support the child through direct modelling at the prospect of a potential stressor, for example stating that it could be perceived as a challenge and not a threat, through coaching their child through the appraisal stage and finally issuing more direct instructions as how the stressor could be perceived. At the coping stage, evidence suggests that parents who model how to use more effective coping strategies have children who use similar coping strategies to their parents (Power, 2004).

School

Schools can be well placed to support children's social and emotional well being (Graham, Phelps, Maddison, & Fitzgerald, 2011) and recent government legislation has placed more emphasis on the role of schools in supporting mental health in children (Thorley, 2016). Schools can provide support for children experiencing stress in a number of ways from the culture and ethos of the school, for example schools who promote success and individual achievement and encourage a sense of belonging and community over pressure to achieve certain grades or levels (Graham et al., 2011). Furthermore, schools can support pupils in learning to manage stress through interventions which entail learning how to manage stress and employ effective coping strategies. In a study by Graham et al., (2011), teachers were asked to rate how important their role, and that of the school, was in supporting children with emotional and social wellbeing. 45% of teachers felt this was important and stated that they felt they had a significant role in helping children to deal with stressors related to family, peers, bullying and difficulties within the school.

2.6.3 Exosystemic influences on stress and coping

The exosystem relates to indirect influences that may impact on the stresses that the children experience such as parental work stress, wider family stresses or experiencing poverty due to wider influences such as low paid jobs or high cost of housing. This could also relate to stresses that include wider influences such as the use of social media and online pressure.

Poverty

The pressure of living in poverty can cause considerable stress (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2018), with childhood poverty increasing in the UK by 500,000 in the last five years. Living in poverty is associated with strained relationships within the family (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2018), disruption to the home environment through having to move home and having an impact on children's school readiness and health (Wickham, 2016). Children who experience poverty may have to face these stressors as well as having parents who are less available to support them with stress and coping due to the stress parents are experiencing as a consequence of living in poverty.

Social Media

The increased use of social media has been cited as causing additional stress and pressure on children and adolescents (The Good Child Report, 2018) due to increased emphasis and comparison to others, especially in relation to appearance   (Pea et al., 2017) and online peer abuse and harassment (Ang & Goh, 2010). However, the evidence of the impact of the use of social media is mixed (Pea et al., 2017) with some research stating that there are benefits associated with social media use as well as potential stressors (Pea et al., 2017).

Wider family stresses

Parental responses to childhood stresses have been linked to helping children with appraising and coping with potential stressors (Power, 2004).

However, interactions between parent and child can vary on a daily basis, due to a range of different factors, which is why theoretical frameworks, such as Bronfenbrenner's, believe that families are best understood within the context of the wider environment (Repetti & Wood, 1997). Influences such as parental stress at work may have an impact on the way parents respond to the stressors and coping of their child (Repetti & Wood, 1997).

Research suggests that parental stress, from difficulties with interpersonal relationships to work pressures, can affect the way mothers interact with their children (Repetti & Wood, 1997). In addition to this, some research suggests that when parents are faced with ongoing daily stressors, their own coping mechanisms can have a negative impact on their interactions with their children. For example, parents may be less emotionally responsive after a stressful day at work as this may have helped them manage the stressors they faced during the day. However, this may not be helpful in responding to their children's needs or in modelling how to cope with stressors experienced. Therefore, stresses that relate to the family can result in extra stressors being experienced and a loss of a valuable protective factor when managing other stresses (Repetti & Wood, 1997).

2.6.4 Macrosystemic influences on stress and coping

Macrosystemic influences identified in relation to childhood stress and coping were current government policy and changes in relation to the curriculum and the pressures on school to show progress through attainment. A further influence is the current government emphasis on schools supporting child

mental health and the impact this may have on how schools support children experiencing stress related issues in schools.

Political pressure on schools

The way in which primary school children were assessed for attainment changed significantly in 2016, especially in relation to the assessment of reading and writing (House of Commons Education Committee, 2017). These changes were made to reflect the new curriculum which was implemented in 2014 in order to raise standards in reading and writing (House of Commons Education Committee, 2017) with more of a focus being given to formal aspects of grammar and punctuation over more creative aspects of reading and writing (House of Commons Education Committee, 2017). Critics of this new system suggest that this has resulted in a narrowed curriculum that is out of sequence with children's developmental levels and puts teachers under pressure for children to achieve certain levels which in turn can lead to a narrowing of the curriculum and teachers who feel they need to 'teach to the test' (House of Commons Education Committee, 2017).

Professional organisations, such as the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), have criticised the curriculum and subsequent assessments as being too hard, putting teachers and children under too much pressure to achieve and not being inclusive or accessible to the needs of all children (House of Commons Education Committee, 2017). As a consequence of these changes, there has been some suggestion that children are experiencing a more pressured and restrictive schooling experience (House of Commons Education Committee, 2017) with some

pupils views suggesting that teachers now have less time, due to the pressures of the new curriculum, to focus on student emotional wellbeing (House of Commons Education Committee, 2017).

Mental health agenda in schools

At the same time as these changes being implemented and as concerns over children's mental health has risen, the government has introduced new measures for schools in supporting child mental health (Thorley, 2016). The proposed changes include having a member of school staff who is identified as a Designated Senior Lead for Mental Health who will identify children or young people who may need additional support for their mental health needs and deliver whole school interventions and initiatives to promote better mental health (DoH & DfE, 2017).

Criticisms of this approach are that it does not address the social issues which may be influencing children's mental health concerns, such as poverty, austerity measures, and that it does not address wider environmental concerns, instead focusing on the individual's response to less than ideal situations (Boyle & Shield, 2018). In terms of how these changes may influence the children's environment, it may be that children are now better supported with understanding and managing their well being and mental health conditions, as more emphasis is placed on this in schools. However, the risks of this approach may be that it ignores the environmental factors that are influencing these situations and risk pathologizing what could be classed as normal responses to environmental stressors (Boyle & Shield, 2018).

2.7 Research Problem

Stress is regarded as a risk factor in the development of mental health problems in children (Dujardin, et al., 2016) and research shows that high levels of stress in children are significantly related to adjustment problems (Quamma & Greenberg, 1994). However despite this, there is little recent research on the stressors that children face in their daily lives and how they cope with this (Valentine, Buchanan, & Knibb, 2009) especially those which use child report measures (Burkhart, Mallers, & Bono, 2017).

Gaining a more detailed view of the way in which children experience stress and the sources of their stress can help interventions be designed which are specifically tailored to children's stress experience and can promote adaptive coping strategies. The use of child report measures is important in this current research as adult reports have often been shown to underestimate the impact of daily stressors on children which may limit the accuracy of findings which use adult reports (Muldoon, 2003). In addition to this, research that has been conducted using child report measures on stress has often been conducted using clinical samples which may not provide a clear picture of the daily stressors experienced by most children within community settings (Burkhart et al., 2017). The research that has captured children's views on stress has often been focused on school stress and neglected out of school stressors such as home and friendships (Burkhart et al., 2017). Furthermore, these studies have often been conducted in the USA (Burkhart et al., 2017) or Australia (Byrne, et al., 2011). In addition to this, the research that has been conducted which uses child report measures, has not drawn upon children's experiences in the formulation of the measures used. This has

often given such measures and adult orientated focus (Dise-Lewis, 1988). Using children's views from the outset is something that future research in this area needs to focus on (Grant et al., 2003).

It is hoped that by further exploring children's experiences of stress and coping through the use of a child report questionnaire, which has been developed using the input of children's experiences, and through qualitative measures of the interviews and open questions on the questionnaire, an accurate and current account of children's stress will be conducted.

Aims

The aims of this research are: to develop further insight in to the stressors that younger children face; to find out the types of coping strategies children of this age use; to identify how educational psychologists might support pupils with learning the most effective ways to manage stress. The final aim is to consider how educational psychologists could support schools and parents in reducing the stresses that the children experience.

2.8 Research questions

1. What type of stressors do children, in years 5-6 (aged 10-11 years), experience on a daily basis?
2. How do children cope with these stressors?
3. What styles of coping do they use?

3 Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological approach chosen for this study. This is followed by details of the methodology, analysis and presentation of results. This includes a description of the sample, the quantitative and qualitative measures used, the procedure followed and the methods of analysis applied.

3.1 Rationale for methodological design

This research adopts a mixed methods approach which integrates qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. The benefits of this approach are that it utilises the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods providing complementary evidence and findings (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016) enabling more complete conclusions to be drawn than the use of quantitative or qualitative approaches alone (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). This approach is well suited to this current study which aims to seek further description of the quantitative results by exploring the topic using qualitative methods.

This study takes a pragmatist stance that incorporates the differences between quantitative and qualitative philosophies (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Pragmatism encourages the selection of the best methodology in order to answer the research questions and address the specific aims of the research (Mertens, 2015).

In line with the pragmatic paradigm, this study adopts the ontological stance that there is one external reality independent of people's own construction of

events (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). A pragmatist paradigm recognises that there can be one single reality but that reality is interpreted differently and uniquely by each individual (Mertens, 2015). Therefore, pragmatism recognises that both objective and subjective points of view can contribute what is known about the construct being examined (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998**).** This approach suited the exploratory nature of this research with the quantitative phase capturing an overview of the topic whilst the qualitative phase explored the subjective experiences of the children in more depth.

3.1.1 Design

A sequential mixed methods design is used (Mertens, 2015), that includes the sequential collection of quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative phase of the study consisted of a cross-sectional, between participant design, where quantitative data, collected through the questionnaire, was used to gain an overview of the stressors and coping strategies children encounter.

The qualitative phase drew upon the data gathered from the questionnaire to further explore the children's views in relation to the information gathered in the first phase. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sub-sample of nine pupils.

3.2 Participants

3.2.1 Recruitment and selection criteria (part 1)

Quantitative studies using questionnaires require a large sample for meaningful conclusions to be drawn from the data (Sturgis, 2012) therefore

achieving a large enough sample to achieve this was important. A power

calculation was carried out with power set at 80% and a medium effect size

of 0.5 with alpha set at 0.05. In order to calculate this, the means of a

previous study (Byrne, et al., 2011), were used to determine the appropriate

sample size. The power calculation indicated that 34 participants were

required for each group (gender).

Participants were recruited using nonprobabalistic sampling (Creswell &

Plano Clark, 2018). Emails were sent to primary schools within the area of

the Local Authority in which the researcher was working. 53 primary schools

were emailed by a representative of the Local Authority. Following the initial

contact, 13 (a response rate of 25%) schools expressed an interest and

contact was made by the researcher. Initial meetings were then set up with

the schools and the details of the research were discussed. Eight primary

schools and one middle school agreed to take part in the study. All schools

were located within the south of England.

3.2.2 Inclusion criteria

In order to meet the research aims, all children who were to take part in the

research were to be in year 5 and 6. No other selection criteria was included.

Letters were then sent to parents providing information about the research

and to gain informed written consent. Informed consent was also gained from

the participants themselves at the start of the questionnaire session (see

Appendix A for parent and child information and consent forms).

3.2.3 Participant characteristics

A total of 214 participants (108 girls and 106 boys) aged 10-11 years old gave informed consent to take part in the research. 205 (96%) of the pupils were in schools in which the number of children entitled to Pupil Premium Grants (PPG) was below the national average. Nine pupils (4%) were in schools where the number of children entitled to PPG was above the national average.

A total of 95 (44%) pupils were in year 5 and 119 (56%) were in year 6 during the academic year 2017-2018. 160 (75%) of these pupils attended a mainstream primary school and 54 (25%) pupils attended a mainstream middle school.

3.2.4 Recruitment and selection criteria: qualitative study (phase 2)

In the second phase of the research pupils were selected by the researcher using a purposive sampling technique which selected individuals who could provide the necessary information required for the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). In this case, pupils were selected if they had shown an understanding of the concept of stress in their responses to the hypothetical scenarios on the questionnaire. An equal sample of boys and girls was selected and a balance between pupils in years 5 and 6 as this represented the gender ratio from the sample who completed the questionnaire.

The researcher contacted the parents of the pupils selected and additional information and consent forms were sent to the parents. Informed consent

was obtained by the researcher at the start of the interview. Nine pupils (5 females and 4 males) were interviewed. Five of the pupils were in year 6 and four were in year 5 during the academic year 2017-2018. It is worth noting that consent for the interviews was much lower than that for the questionnaire and this may have implications for the findings from the interview data.

3.3 Ethical considerations

This research was conducted within the guidelines of the British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct (2009) and British Psychological Society Code of Human Research Ethics (2014). This was particularly important due to the potentially sensitive issues raised in this research. Ethical approval was gained from the UCL Institute of Education Ethics Committee.

3.3.1 Informed Consent

Informed consent was gained from the parents before the research was carried out in accordance with the BPS guidelines with working with children under sixteen (Hill, 2005). Information sheets (Appendix A) were sent out to the parents along with an adapted child friendly version for the children. These explained the aims and purpose of the research, how the data would be treated confidentially and reported anonymously and the right to withdraw from the research at any point. The researcher's contact details were also provided in the information letter. Informed consent was obtained from the children at the start of the administration of the questionnaire. The information letter was reviewed with the children and consent forms were

handed out. Any child who did not wish to participate was removed from the study. For the interviews, the information letter was reviewed with the child at the start of the session and their consent obtained by the researcher. Following the administration of the questionnaire and completion of the interview, a debriefing opportunity was provided. Participants were given the opportunity to talk with the researcher if they wished and signposting to their class teacher or the SENCo, was provided if they felt they needed to discuss any concerns at a later time. This had been discussed with school staff beforehand and they were aware of this procedure being in place.

3.4 Quantitative measures

3.4.1 Questionnaire design

In order to find out the stressors children face and how they cope with these stressors, a questionnaire was written and developed by the author (see Appendix B). Questionnaires provide a simple and versatile method of collecting larger amounts of data that is of good enough quality to make tentative suggestions regarding real-world policy change (Fife-Schaw, 2012). They are a good way of gaining descriptive information on a range of characteristics across a larger group of people (Robson, 2002). Therefore, questionnaires provide an appropriate research tool to find out what stressors children are currently facing.

3.4.2 Questionnaire development

The questionnaire development followed the procedure as outlined in Robson (2002), starting with the construction of the first draft, then an initial

informal pre-test and then a pilot with respondents from the group of interest (Robson, 2002). Prior to the construction of the first draft, a review of stress questionnaires for children within this age group was conducted. These had been identified as part of the Literature Review. This enabled the author to review the items included in previous research, the format of questionnaires and the methodological implications of devising a questionnaire for this age group (Byrne et al., 2011).

Initial items included on the questionnaire were developed from different sources. Previous research undertaken by the author had identified the following themes in relation to the stress children within a similar age group (year 6) experience. These were: SATs and tests; working under time constraints in class; peer difficulties and class dynamics; family worries and the increased responsibility of being in year 6. These categories were used to define the different categories within the current questionnaire. Following this, individual items were devised from the responses given within these themes, generated from the author's previous research (Sugg, 2017, unpublished). Items were kept grouped together within the categories outlined above as this was felt to be less confusing for the child answering the questions. Individual items were derived from the qualitative data gained during the focus groups from the researcher's previous work. These were transcribed, then analysed using thematic analysis. The themes were used to devise the categories in this questionnaire, whereas individual codes were grouped together to form the items on this questionnaire.

The wording of the questions aimed to be clear and concise, avoiding vague terms or leading questions (Fife-Schaw, 2012). Double-barrelled questions

were avoided as these can cause confusion (Fife-Schaw, 2012). Leading questions were also avoided as these can influence the response given (Robson, 2002). Responses on the questionnaire used a five point Likert scale to ascertain whether or not the stressor had been experienced by the child and the impact of this. Likert scales can look interesting to respondents and can provide an easy and motivating way to answer a series of questions (Robson, 2002). This was considered to be an important issue when presenting this questionnaire to children who may find open ended questions difficult to answer. The use of a smiley face response was used to provide a visual representation of the scale in a way which may be motivating and easy for the children to respond to. Coping style items were reported in accordance to how often the children used a particular coping strategy.

Space was provided on the questionnaire for open ended responses to give the child the opportunity to provide more information (Fife-Schaw, 2012). This was included as the fixed response nature of the items being presented to the child meant that unexpected responses were ruled out (Fife-Schaw, 2012) and therefore could limit the scope of the information gained.

Following this stage, the draft questionnaire was pre-tested by asking colleagues on the researcher's course to comment on the wording of the questions and make additional comments regarding the items. Feedback resulted in the rewording of some items to ensure it was clear to the respondent what was being asked. This re-wording did not involve changing the content of any of the items but focused on simplifying the language or sentence structure. In addition to this, some further items were added. These related to the use of social media and transitional milestones, such as going

to secondary school, which had not been included in the original questionnaire. This resulted in the questionnaire consisting of 49 items relating to the stressors children may face and 20 items relating to the type of coping strategy they use.

Following ethical approval, the questionnaire was piloted with five pupils who were within the same age range as the participants of the study. These children were not part of the sample selected to complete the questionnaire as part of the research. The piloting of the questionnaire resulted in some changes including the rewording of some questions to make them clearer or the words easier to understand, for example changing the term 'residential trip' to 'a school trip where you stay overnight' as most of the children from the pilot did not know what the term 'residential' meant. Certain items were condensed as they were considered too similar, for example 'people saying mean things about me' and 'people saying bad things about me' was changed to 'people saying bad things about me.' Students from the pilot stated that this was confusing as the two items were too similar. Four additional items were also added: playing computer games as a coping strategy; friends getting a higher mark in their work than you; not getting homework handed in on time and taking deep breaths as a coping strategy. These were strategies that pupils stated they used when they felt stressed and so were added to reflect a more accurate choice of coping strategies. Finally, the numbers were removed from the Likert scale for the coping section and children had to tick the most appropriate category as feedback from the pilot stated that the numbers were confusing when you only had to

tick which statement applied to how frequently you used the coping strategy and therefore the numbers had no values associated with them.

The layout of a questionnaire is important as it can influence the motivation of the person to complete the questionnaire (Fife-Schaw, 2012). This could be particularly important for children. Therefore, some pictures relating to the categories were added. Smiley faces were used to illustrate the Likert scale, something that has proved successful when administering questionnaires with children (Fife- Schaw, 2012). Following the pilot and amendments, the final questionnaire consisted of 73 items measuring children's responses to both the stressors they faced and the coping strategies used.

Validity in a questionnaire ensures that the questionnaire is measuring the construct that is intended (Robson, 2002). In order to ensure internal validity, that is that the respondents are reporting their views and experience of stress, clear and unambiguous wording was used. Cronbach's alpha was conducted to calculate the internal consistency of the items within the questionnaire. The results of this are presented in the table below:

Table 1 Cronbach's alpha for questionnaire subscales

Scale:	Cronbach's alpha:	Internal consistency:
SATs and tests	.808	Good
School work	.885	Good
Friendships	.869	Good

Growing up	.612	Questionable
Family Life	.816	Good
Coping	.773	Acceptable

As the internal consistency was good across the majority of the subscales, it was decided to proceed with the final version of the questionnaire. It was noted that the internal consistency for the growing up scale was below acceptable levels, therefore this scale was constructed a number of times by omitting each item to explore if this would improve the internal consistency. This did not result in any improvements and so therefore the full set of items remained within the scale. See table 2 below:

Table 2 Adjusted internal consistency for growing up scale

item omitted	adjusted internal consistency
Having to work hard to take entrance tests for secondary school	.612
Having to perform in a school production or play	.602
Working with younger children and having to look after them at school	.590
Being worried about going on a school trip where you stay overnight	.571
Being worried about going to secondary school	.525
Worrying about not getting a secondary school of my choice	.553

Having to run clubs or groups for younger pupils	.591
Worrying about getting lost in strange places	.570

To ensure reliability, all questions were presented in the same format. The same procedure was followed for the administration of each questionnaire.

Following the development of the questionnaire, discussions took place with the school's SENCo in order to ensure that all children would be able to access the questionnaire and some adaptations were made to ensure all children were able to access the written format of the questionnaire. This included changing the font size of the questionnaire for a pupil with visual impairment, going through key vocabulary and concepts beforehand to check the children understood the wording of the questionnaire and reading aloud sections of the questionnaire to children who required help with reading.

3.5 Qualitative measures

3.5.1 Semi-structured interviews

Further insights into the children's experiences of stress were gained by using semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are a good way of gaining more in depth data about a subject (Robson, 2002) as well as providing the researcher with the opportunity to follow up lines of enquiry presented by the participants which may not have occurred to the researcher (Robson, 2002). This is well suited to the exploratory nature of this study and enabled the researcher to expand on the information gained from the

questionnaires. Semi-structured interviews provide the opportunity to develop questions in response to the exchange that occurs between the interviewer and the respondent (Breakwell, 2012) which may increase the chances of more unexpected responses and original ideas to be explored (Fife-Schaw, 2012).

The interview schedule consisted of a series of open ended questions that related to the six sections of the questionnaire. These questions were phrased using simple, child friendly language. Some closed questions were included to be used if respondents struggled with the nature of the open ended questionnaires, something which had been raised during the piloting phase of the interview.

The information derived from the questionnaire was used to inform some of the questions or to add additional information to findings which had come out of the questionnaire. However, the researcher wanted to keep questions as open as possible to avoid merely quantifying findings presented in the questionnaire. Therefore, questions were presented in a way which encouraged the respondents to elaborate further on key areas. For example, asking the pupils how they found the behaviour of other children in school as this was something that had been noted in the quantitative section of the questionnaire. The qualitative, or open ended questions at the end of the questionnaire and the interview, were designed to elicit further ideas from the children that the closed questions were not able to cover. They were designed to offer participants a space to provide any further relevant information and as such did not inform the other questions but instead were an addendum to the closed questions of the questionnaire measure.

If it appeared that the respondent did not understand then the question was rephrased or repeated. During the pilot of the interview, some questions were modified and the structure of the schedule was changed reflecting the responses of the respondent. The final interview schedule consisted of 12 questions (see Appendix C).

3.6 Procedure

Once consent had been obtained, a suitable date and time was decided with each school's SENCo for the administration of the questionnaire. The researcher administered the questionnaire to the children in each of the nine schools. The questionnaire was administered in a classroom or another teaching room. A member of school staff, usually the class teacher or the SENCo, was present whilst the questionnaire was administered. If a child regularly had the support of a teaching assistant then they were asked if they would like them to remain with them. The administration of the questionnaire took about 50 minutes including the introduction prepared by the researcher which included defining the term stress and checking that the children had an accurate understanding of what the term meant. In order to check the children's understanding of this term, two hypothetical scenarios were read aloud to the children before the administration of the questionnaire. Each child had a copy of the scenarios and were able to follow as the researcher read them aloud. Following this, the children had to select how the main character in the scenario may be feeling from three different responses. The aim of this was to identify any children who did not have an accurate

understanding of stress. 138 children, out of the sample of 214, were able to correctly identify the concept of stress from reading and responding to the first scenario and 188 children responded correctly to the second scenario. Following this, further clarification and discussion of the term 'stress' was conducted to ensure that the children understood the terminology being used.

Adults were available to read any items or sections of the questionnaire if requested by the child but otherwise they stood away from the children to ensure that the children felt comfortable to be honest in their responses. Following administration of the questionnaire the participants took part in the debriefing session and then were taken back to their normal lessons by a member of the school staff.

Following preliminary analysis of the questionnaires, nine semi-structured interviews were then conducted. Three of these were carried out in the homes of the participants and six were carried out in a quiet room in the school the participant attended. Following the interview, the participants were given the opportunity to talk about any issues arising from the interview and ask any questions. They then returned to their normal activities.

3.7 Data Analysis

When analysing data using a mixed methods approach, consideration needs to be given to the weighting of the data (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). This refers to the relative importance of the quantitative or qualitative data obtained. In this study, there is equal weighting of the data where both types of data will play an equally important role in answering the research

questions (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). In terms of integration of the data, a connecting approach was used. This is where the data collected using one method informs the collection and analysis of the other (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). In this case, the responses gained from the questionnaires informed the questions and direction of the semi-structured interviews.

3.7.1 Quantitative analysis: questionnaire data

Data from the fixed response questions was analysed using a quantitative method of analysis. In order for the data to be understood in relation to the research questions, exploratory analysis of the data was conducted to enable further exploration of the data reflecting the exploratory nature of this research (Robson, 2002).

Exploratory data analysis was conducted on all of the items and main variables using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS25:IBM). Mean scores and standard deviations are presented on table 3 on page 73. The main variables were constructed from the items from the questionnaire relating to the following areas: SATs and tests; school work; friendships, growing up, family life and total stress. This resulted in six variables. Exploratory Data Analysis was conducted to check for assumption of normal distribution (see Appendix D). As this was met for all the six variables, parametric tests were carried out.

A one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to see if there was a difference between the levels of stress experienced across the nine schools on the stress variables created. An ANOVA was selected as there were more than two levels of the dependent variable (school) in relation to

the independent variable selected (total stress) (Mertens, 2015). As the difference between schools was not significant all further analysis involved the children from all of the schools in the same sample.

A repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to explore whether some stressors were more stressful than others. This was conducted across all the schools. Post-hoc paired t-tests were conducted to further explore the differences between the levels of stress experienced across the six main variables.

A Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to see if there was a difference between gender and year group on the total stress subscale in order to identify if girls were experiencing stress differently to boys and whether younger children were experiencing stress differently to older children. Following this, independent t-tests were conducted to identify the differences between the boys' and girls' experiences of stress. The Bonferroni correction was applied to correct for multiple testing and an adjusted p value of 0.008 was set to reduce the risk of making a Type 1 error. The coping responses were analysed using a chi-square analysis as the responses due to the responses being presented as categorical data (Mertens, 2015).

3.7. 2 Qualitative analysis:

Questionnaire data

The data from the open ended questions from the questionnaires was typed up by the researcher and then analysed using thematic analysis following the procedure outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), see Table 3.

Interview data

The nine interviews were recorded and saved on an audio recorder and then transcribed verbatim by the researcher (see Appendix E for an example). The aim of carrying out the interviews with the children was to gain their views on an area that is currently under researched with children of this age group. Thematic analysis was selected to analyse this data as it is a method that can analyse the data in rich detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006) by identifying, analysing and reporting patterns from within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis can be conducted in two ways: using a 'bottom up' (inductive) or a 'top down' (deductive) approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study an inductive approach was employed as the codes were identified from the data itself and pre-existing categories or research were not used as a coding frame to identify the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach was used as the aim of this part of the research was to identify patterns from the data in an area where little research had taken place within this age group. Therefore, an inductive approach was employed in order to create a detailed account of the children's experience of stress.

The data from the interviews was then analysed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) method (see Table 2). After the initial identification of themes, themes were reviewed and adjusted once before they were finalised (Braun

& Clarke, 2006). This included renaming some themes and the removal of another theme.

Table 3 Phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Phases of thematic analysis	Description of phase
Phase 1 Familiarising yourself with the data	The data from the interviews was transcribed by the researcher. These were reread in order for the researcher to become immersed in the data. Initial ideas and thoughts were noted.
Phase 2 Generating initial codes	The researcher went through the entire data set coding items alongside the interview transcript which had been copied on to a table. Initial codes were written in a column alongside the transcript.
Phase 3 Searching for themes	Codes were then read and patterns or possible themes were identified by the researcher. Codes were categorised into these potential themes. These were reviewed by another person with some themes being deleted as these were

	duplicated within the data set. Themes not relevant to the research questions were discarded.
Phase 4 Reviewing themes	This phase involved the refinement of the themes. Themes were presented using a thematic map. Themes were condensed and resulted in 11 themes for the questionnaire data and 10 for the interview data. The prevalence of themes was identified across the data set.
Phase 5 Defining and naming themes	Themes were named and defined.
Phase 6 Producing the report	The report of the findings was written with the inclusion of the thematic map and thematic analysis table.

4 Results

This chapter firstly presents the quantitative analysis of the levels of stress and coping styles experienced by the participants as measured by the questionnaire. This is followed by the qualitative analysis of the responses given to the open questions of the questionnaire using thematic analysis. Finally, the qualitative analysis of the semi-structured interviews carried out with nine children, using thematic analysis, is reported.

4.1 Quantitative results

4.1.1 Descriptive statistics for stress variables

The means and SD on levels of total stress and each of the stress subscales (SATs and tests; school work; friendships; growing up and family life) were conducted for each participant. These are presented for each group in table 4.

Table 4 Means and SD for stress variables

Group					Stress variables							
	SATS and tests		School work		Friendships		Growing up		Family life		Total stress	
Gender	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Boys	.84	.51	1.11	.68	1.02	.75	.77	.53	1.30	.82	.98	.54
Girls	1.09	.63	1.32	.73	1.34	.81	.93	.48	1.45	.80	1.23	.55

School	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
school 1	1.14	.53	1.43	.70	1.35	1.0	1.00	.60	1.39	.97	1.27	.75
school 2	1.06	.65	1.38	.77	1.32	.88	.95	.47	1.49	.81	1.21	.57
school 3	.94	.71	1.07	.67	1.06	.59	.77	.49	1.25	.71	1.07	.55
school 4	.99	.58	1.03	.73	.94	.87	.85	.59	1.28	.99	1.10	.58
school 5	.98	.68	1.29	.79	1.17	.86	.84	.50	1.30	.75	1.07	.58
School 6	.68	.35	.57	.19	.64	.44	.75	.40	.90	.28	.70	.24
School 7	1.09	.27	1.34	1.03	1.42	.53	1.43	.56	1.93	.82	1.39	.58
school 8	1.06	.48	1.46	.62	1.48	.55	1.04	.62	1.50	.64	1.36	.39
school 9	.89	.51	1.14	.60	1.13	.85	.69	.43	1.42	.92	1.05	.56
Year group	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
year 5	1.04	.64	1.30	.77	1.26	.83	.87	.51	1.50	.91	1.21	.60
year 6	.91	.54	1.15	.66	1.11	.76	.83	.51	1.27	.70	1.04	.51

4.1.2 School comparison

The results from the ANOVA showed there was no main effect of school site ($F(8,181),=1.4$, $p=.193$). Levene's test showed that the variance of the two groups were not significantly different from each other ($F(8,81)=1.08$, $p=.380$), therefore the data met assumptions of the homogeneity of variance. As the difference from the ANOVA was not significant all further analyses

involved all children from all of the nine schools being within the same sample.

4.1.3 Comparison of difference between stress variables/ RQ 1 What type of stressors do children, in years 5 and 6 (10-11 years), experience on a daily basis?

The results from the repeated measures ANOVA identified that there was a significant difference between the levels of stress experienced across the five stress variables (F(4, 756)=40.73;p=0.≤001)**.** This showed that participants found some stresses more stressful than others. Post hoc paired t-tests were conducted to identify where the differences were. The results are presented in table 4. Effect sizes were interpreted using the following guidelines: small (0.2); medium (0.5) or large (0.8) (Cohen, 1988).

Table 5: Results from paired t-tests.

Pair	Mean difference	Effect size	t value and significance	What this means
SATs and tests School work	.23	small effect size (d=0.37)	(t(200)7.25: p=0.≤001)	School work is more stressful than SATs
SATs and tests friendships	.21	small effect size (d=0.30)	(t(202)4.33; p=0.≤001)	Friendship stress is more stressful than SATs and tests
SATs and tests growing up	.13	small effect size(d=0.24)	(t(201)3.29;p=.001)	SATs and test stress is more stressful than

				growing up stress
SATs and tests family	.40	medium effect size(d=0.57)	(t(201)7.51; p=0.≤001)	Family stress is more stressful than SATs and tests
school work stress and friendship	0.03	small effect size (d=0.36)	(t(204)0.624;p=0.534)	There is not a significant difference between school work and friendship
school work and growing up	.37	medium effect size (d=0.6)	(t(203)8.96; p=0.≤001)	School work is more stressful than growing up
school work stress and family	.17	small effect size (d=0.2)	(t(201)3.46;p=0.001)	Family stress is more stressful than school work
friendship stress and growing up	.34	medium effect size(d=0.5)	(t(205)7.29; p=0.≤001)	Friendship stress is more stressful than growing up
friendship and family stress	.20	small effect size(d=0.25)	(t(203)4.49: p=0.≤001)	Family stress is higher than friendship

				stress
growing up and family stress	.54	large effect size (d=0.8)	(*t(*202)11.02; *p*=0.≤001)	Family stress is more stressful than growing up stress

Corrected p value 0.005 as Bonferroni correction applied for multiple testing

These findings indicate that family stress was higher than the other stressors. Growing up stress was rated as being less stressful when compared to the other stressors. There was a non significant, small sized difference between school and friendships. This could be due to the analysis being underpowered, meaning that it is hard to detect a difference between the variables. However, a power calculation was conducted (see chapter 3) which suggests this study was adequately powered.

4.1.4 Gender and year group comparison

The results from the MANOVA showed that there was a main effect of gender (F(1,190)=7.94, p=0.05). The results from the MANOVA showed there was no main effect for year group (F(1,190)=3.53, p=0.62). This suggests that girls are experiencing stress differently to boys. Children in year 6 are not experiencing stress differently to children in year 5. The results show that there is no significant gender by year group interaction (F1,190)=1.95, p=.164).

As the results show that boys and girls differ across all subscales, independent t-tests were conducted to find out the difference. After correcting for multiple testing, there was no longer a significance difference between gender and school work and growing up stress. There was a significant gender difference between SATS and tests and friendships with girls experiencing more stress than boys with these two variables.

Table 6 results from independent t-tests

Stress variable	t value	Significance	Significant after Bonferroni correction	Effect size	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
SATs and tests	3.18	0.002	Y	0.4 (small)	.41	.10
School work	2.18	.030	N	0.4 (small)	.41	.02
Friendships	2.99	.003	Y	0.4 (small)	.54	.11
Growing up	2.35	.020	N	0.3 (small)	.30	.03
Family life	1.34	.182	N	0.1 (small)	.37	.07

Total stress	2.01	0.46	N	0.4	.41	0.1
						(small)

Corrected p value 0.008 as Bonferroni correction applied for multiple testing

4.1.5. RQ 2. How do children cope with these stressors?

Frequencies for the coping variables are presented in Appendix H. These show how frequently children reported using coping strategies outlined in the questionnaire. The strategies that were rated as being used a lot were: spending time with a friend; doing something to take my mind off it such as playing video games; taking my mind off the stress by doing an activity that they enjoyed; spending time with a pet and wishing that the problem would go away.

The strategies that were rated as being used least frequently were: going for a walk alone or with a pet; talking to a toy or teddy; doing something to calm down such as meditation; staying in bed longer than usual; and phoning or messaging a friend.

Results showed that there were significant gender differences for the following coping variables: playing computer/video games; talking to a toy or teddy and talking or messaging friends on the phone. The results indicated that boys were more likely to play computer or video games to cope with stress ($\chi 2$ (3)=31.88*, p* = .≤001). Girls were more likely to talk to a teddy or toy as a means of coping ($\chi 2$ (3) = 14.70, *p* = 0.002) and more likely to talk to friends or message on the phone than boys ($\chi 2$ (3)=10.0, *p*=0.19).

4.2 Qualitative results

The qualitative data was gained from the responses to the open ended questions on the questionnaire and from the interviews conducted following the administration of the questionnaire.

4.2.1 Questionnaire data

Responses from the open ended questions on the questionnaire were typed up and then analysed using thematic analysis as described in chapter 3 (see Appendix F for a table of themes, sub-themes and extracts of this data).

In addition to this, transcripts were also re-examined to see if there were any themes which had not been identified in the original analysis. This was considered an important step to ensure that the categories from the questionnaire had not influenced the identification of themes ensuring a inductive approach to thematic analysis was carried out.

The first analysis of the responses identified five themes relating to the stressors children experienced and six themes relating to coping. The stress related themes were: pressure to do well in SATs and tests; the pressure of school work; friendship difficulties; comparison to others and family pressure. Following a review of the data, there were no further additional themes identified. The six coping themes were: physical comfort; support; avoidance and escape; purposeful attempts to relax; distraction and active coping.

Details of the themes and sub-themes is in the figure below:
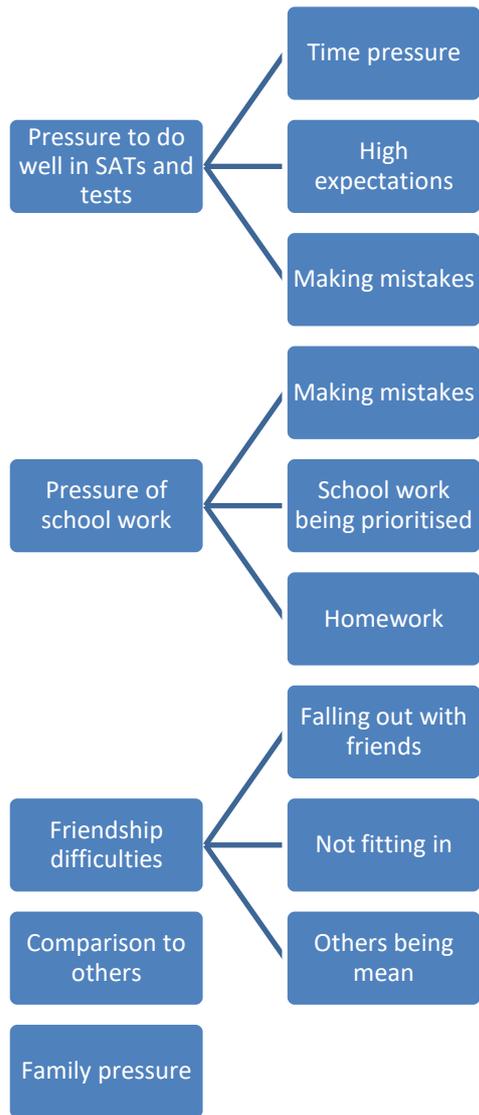
Figure 1: Thematic map showing student responses to stresses experienced
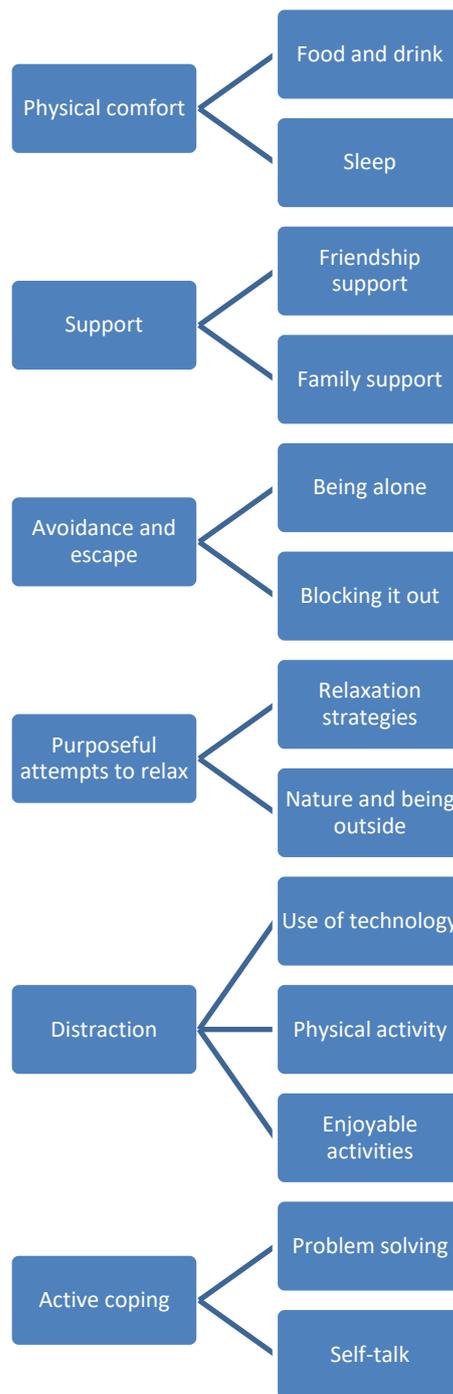
Figure 2: Thematic map showing student responses to coping.

Whilst there was some overlap between the interview and questionnaire themes, these were reported separately as the sample from the questionnaire was separate from those who took part in the interviews.

4.3 RQ 1: What types of stressors do children, in years 5 and 6 (aged 10-11 years) experience on a daily basis?

4.3.1. Theme 1: Pressure to do well in SATs and tests

This theme described how the children felt in relation to taking SATs and tests. Responses described the pressure to do well including high parental and teacher expectations, the fear or worry of making mistakes and not understanding the work or questions. The time pressure of working under test conditions was also reported.

> *I find it really stressful when we have a test and we have an hour and I finish in the first 20 minutes and then I am scared I have done something wrong.*

> *After I had finished my SATs my parents were really proud of my scores because they were really good. It made me a bit worried because if I don't do well in my next test my parents might not be happy with me.*

4.3.2. Theme 2: Pressure of school work

This theme related to the pressure the children who completed the questionnaire felt in relation to their school work. This included comments relating to having to complete work in a set amount of time, concerns over missing work and not being able to catch up, making mistakes and homework pressure. Comments relating to missing work referred to the conflict experienced if the child had to miss part of a lesson for some reason such as music and feeling that they would not be able to catch up.

> *When I go to my keyboard lesson and miss half an hour, some of the*
> *teachers tell me off for not doing enough work.*

Other comments related to the pressure children felt when making mistakes or not doing well in their school work.

> *When I make stupid mistakes and I know I am doing it wrong but I*
> *can't fix it*

4.3.3 Theme 3: Friendship difficulties

This theme described the difficulties the children faced in relation to their friendships. This referred to changing friendships (when friends appeared to no longer want to be your friend without an apparent reason), falling out with friends, peers being mean and not fitting in with others. Some of the comments reflected some quite unkind behaviour that the children had experienced from other children, not necessarily their friends, at school. One respondent commented:

> *Lots of people in my class say that I am dumb and weird but one*
> *person said that I should be in a mental hospital and I cried for three*
> *days.*

Whilst another commented on not enjoying a particular game and how this made them appear different to their peers:

> *There is currently a craze for a game called Fornite. I don't know*
> *much and get called sad and a loner, don't want to put any names*
> *though.*

4.3.4 Theme 4: Comparison to others

This theme was identified across different areas of the questionnaire and related to children feeling inferior to or comparing themselves to others both at home and at school. It concerned school work, comparison to others who were perceived as more popular or fun than they were and comparison to siblings.

Comments included:

> *I feel stressed and like there is a lot of pressure on me because she [sister] always gets excellent results and my parents expect the same thing from me.*

Children also felt that there was pressure for them to be working at the same academic level as their peers and they could feel inferior if they were working at a lower level than others. For example, comments included:

> *When you get easier work than everybody else.*

Other responses were concerned with being in different sets or groups for their school work.

> *My friends are in the high group and I am in the low one*

4.3.5 Theme 5: Family pressure

This theme concerned the pressures that the children experienced at home. This included sibling rivalry, being told off by parents, high expectations from parents and parents splitting up. Whilst family appears to be viewed as an essential support network for children (see Figure 2), the stress children

experienced when there are difficulties at home appear to cause them more upset than other stressors. This was reflected in both their comments on the questionnaire and in the ratings on the questionnaire. It may be worth noting that when children did experience stress within the family, these were often quite serious life events such as illness, death or parents getting divorced.

This is reflected by the comments the children made on the questionnaire which included:

> *My mum has gallstones and she's about to have an operation to take*
> *them out. When I'm bad, I get told off more than normal, so that*
> *stresses me out. I got quite stressed when my mum and dad broke up*

> *Someone (my grandad) died and it made me very upset*

4.4 RQ 2. How do children cope with these stressors?

The responses related to coping were grouped into the following themes: physical comfort; support; avoidance and escape; purposeful attempts to relax, distraction and active coping. The themes and sub-themes are illustrated in Figure 2.

Physical comfort

Within the theme of physical comfort, the following sub-themes were identified: food and drink and sleep. These themes were not identified during the analysis of the interviews but appeared to be quite strong within the questionnaire data being identified in fifteen (7%) of the questionnaire responses. Food and drink concerned children choosing to eat when they felt

stressed and mostly their choice of food was sweet food or food they regarded as 'junk food'.

I eat things which are sweet.

Have a bit of junk food

Go to my room and eat the snacks I like.

Sometimes they would eat food alongside other activities that they felt took their mind off the stress they were experiencing.

Eat some crisps and watch YouTube.

The second sub-theme was sleeping, which concerned children using sleep as a way to escape from the stress. This was not coded under the avoidance and escape theme as it concerned a more physical escape from the stress rather than a way of psychologically avoiding thinking about the stressor. Sleep took the form of having a nap or extra sleep to avoid thinking about the stress or for some temporary release from their immediate environment or going to bed earlier to escape from their stresses.

Take a nap to take it off my mind

Go to bed earlier than usual.

The second theme, support, was divided into two sub-themes, support from friends and support from family. Friendship support concerned seeing friends to take their mind off the stress or seeking advice from their friends as to how to manage a problem or stressor. The theme of friendship support was less strong in the questionnaires than it was from the interview data with five

responses indicating that they spent time with friends or saw their friends as a supportive in managing stress. However, it is worth noting that talking to friends was included in the questionnaire so some children may not have added it on as this was already included as an option.

> *Maybe going to the park and meeting up with all of my friends to take my mind off problems that I might of had at school or at home.*

> *I phone call a friend to know how they are doing and seeing if they can help me with my problems.*

Family support consisted of activities with family to take their mind off the stress, contact with members of their extended family and support from their siblings. Hugs and physical contact with family were also mentioned in three of the questionnaires.

> *I hug my parents and cry*

> *Stay with my family and try to do nice things to get it off my mind.*

Avoidance and escape

The theme of avoidance and escape referred to attempts by the children to avoid the stressor or to try and escape from the immediate pressures they were experiencing. This was divided in to the sub-themes of being alone and blocking out the thoughts of the stress. Being alone seemed to be a way of simply removing themselves from others with the children describing how they would go to their bedroom or find a quiet, often secret or dark space, to be alone.

> *Sometimes I just go to a quiet place.*

> *Shut myself in a dark room and listen to music*

> *Go to a quiet place and just sit there or staying in a compact space for a while.*

The sub-theme of blocking out the thoughts described how the children would try and forget about the problem often by using their imagination or reading to take them to someplace else.

> *I wrap myself in my special blanket and imagine myself away to my safeplace*

> *Sometimes I imagine that I'm flying and that I'm cool and invisible.*

Purposeful attempts to relax

The theme of purposeful attempts to relax described how the children used specific strategies in order for them to keep calm in stressful situations. This was divided into two sub-themes: relaxation strategies and going outside to calm down and often, to appreciate the calmness of nature and being in different environment. Relaxation strategies were described as having a bath, lying back and appreciating the quiet and strategies such as taking deep breaths or counting to ten.

> *I enjoy having baths, it makes me feel relaxed.*

> *Counting to 10 in my head to calm down.*

Appreciation of being outside and the relaxing properties of nature included comments such as:

Sometimes I sit by my bedroom window, watching the birds - I love birds.

I like to go outside and get some fresh air.

Distraction

The theme of distraction referred to ways in which the children sought to take part in activities that would take their mind off the stress by giving them something else to do. This relates to the sub-themes of: use of technology; physical activity and the third sub-theme of other enjoyable activities to take their mind off the stress.

The use of technology to provide a distraction including the use of YouTube to watch funny videos to take their mind off the stress. Seven children reported going on YouTube as a distraction with comments such as:

I watch YouTube to take my mind off everything

When I am stressed I watch YouTube videos that make me laugh because they help me to forget what I am stressing about .

Other distractions within this sub-theme included playing video games, playing on phones or watching funny films often online.

The two other sub-themes were similar in the fact that the children actively looked to do activities to take their mind off things, including sport:

I spend a lot of time at my dance school to escape.

or other types of physical activity:

> *I go into the garden and go on my trampoline if I am feeling stressed because it blows my cobwebs away and makes me feel better.*

Otherwise, children would engage in other enjoyable activities as a distraction:

> *I sometimes do arts and crafts e.g. drawing, colouring and painting.*

Active coping

The last theme on coping is active coping whereby the children described how they try and solve or change the problem in some way. This theme showed some insight in to how the children felt able to actively solve the problems they were facing which provides some useful insight but it was a strategy that three employed when feeling stressed. This included approaches such as:

> *I splash cold water on my face and then sit on my bed and try to sort the problem out in my head.*

> *talk to myself about what I could do*

> *I stretch out the problem and talk/whisper it to myself. It makes me calm.*

4. 5 Interview data

Following the questionnaire, nine participants were selected to participate in a semi-structured interview with the researcher to further explore their views about stress and coping. Responses were recorded, transcribed and

analysed using thematic analysis as described in chapter 3. The nine interviews ranged in length from 20 minutes to 41 minutes and a transcript of one of the interviews can be found in Appendix E.

4.5.1. RQ 1: What type of stressors do children, in year 5 and 6 (aged 10-11 years), experience on a daily basis?

Analysis of the transcripts identified seven themes in relation the stresses children face (see Appendix G for Thematic Analysis table). These are: pressure to do well in SATS and tests; the importance of doing well in school; pressure to do well in class; Social Media; difficulties with the peer group, home pressure and physical changes experienced.

4.5.2. RQ 2: How do children cope with these stressors?

Four themes were identified in relation to how children cope with these stresses. These were: support; escaping from it all; active coping and avoidance. Some of these themes contain subthemes which are detailed in Figures 3 and 4 below:

```
Pressure to do
well in SATs/tests
    ├── Having to achieve a certain level
    └── Worried about failing

Importance of doing well in school
    ├── Taking school work seriously
    └── importance of doing your best

Pressure to achieve in class
    ├── Worry about making mistakes
    └── Pressure of working hard all the time

Social Media
    ├── Crazes for latest games/apps
    │   Arguments over group chats/social media
    └── Others' involvement of social media

Difficulties with peer group
    ├── Behaviour of others in class
    ├── Differences between groups
    └── People being mean

Home pressure
    ├── Family health
    ├── Conflict
    ├── Parental stress
    └── Too much to do

Physical changes
```

Figure 3: Thematic map showing student responses to stresses experienced
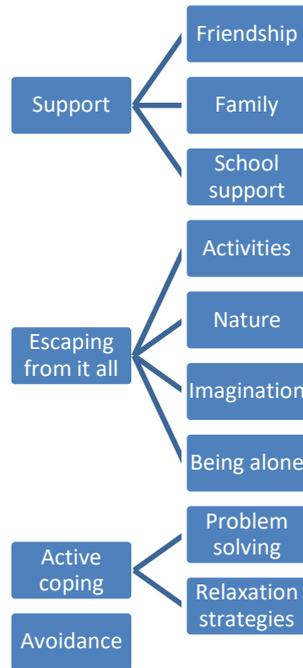
Figure 4: Student responses for coping strategy used.

4.5. 3. Theme 1: pressure of SATs and tests

Within this theme respondents spoke about how they felt in relation to SATs and tests in school. Within this theme, two sub-themes were identified. These were having to achieve a certain level and being worried about failing. This related to feeling that there was pressure to achieve a certain level, SATs taking a priority over other activities such as music or lessons perceived as fun, worries about failing the tests or making a mistake in the test.

Respondents expressed that they felt under pressure to achieve a certain level in their SATs tests and whilst this may not have been directed at them specifically by teachers or parents, the general emphasis of the importance of doing well in SATs made them feel under pressure to achieve. For four pupils, this was perceived as doing their best and that was good enough but for the other five they felt under pressure to achieve a specified target. This feeling of pressure to achieve was expressed more strongly by pupils in year 6 than in year 5.

> *Well I was worried I wasn't going to get the questions right*
>
> (respondent 1, year 6).
>
> *Erm well the teachers obviously wanted us to do well so I did find a little bit of pressure because they gave load of tests and they were like you should do well we know you can do it.*
>
> (respondent 5, year 6)
>
> *I felt fine I was like erm I'll try my best whatever score comes up that will the score that I get I did as well as I could and I'm fine with that yeah.*
>
> (respondent 6, year 6)

Other comments reflected on the ongoing pressure of practising for SATs and how at times, this could feel overwhelming. However, there was an overall consensus from all respondents that practise for tests, and SATs in particular, was helpful and necessary in order for them to do well and achieve a good score.

I was mostly like this is a practice test and the score doesn't really matter it helps me to get better at what I was going to do so I guess just practise.

(respondent 6, year 6)

Researcher: So if you could say how the practice helped you what would you say?

Respondent: That we kind of got used to the questions. And the hard questions and if we were confused then we were allowed to go back and change them.

(respondent 1, year 6)

We spent quite a lot of time on SATs practice and things that would be in SATs practising that and stuff like that yeah.

(respondent 6, year 6)

4.5.4 Theme 2: the importance of doing well in school

In the second theme participants discussed how they felt about the pressure to perform well in school, not just in relation to SATs and tests. Two sub-themes were identified: taking school work seriously and the importance of doing your best. This concerned the following areas: feeling like they had to perform at their best in everything they did, having study groups at home in order to do well in school, wanting to know how well they had done in their work and having a high personal standard of what they wanted to achieve. There was some overlap between this and theme 1 as in year 6, a lot of the

school work they did fed directly into working towards doing well in their SATs tests.

The desire to do well in school appeared to be consistent amongst all of the nine respondents and presented itself as them working hard in order to do well.

> *we helped each other study and we really wanted each other to do well* (respondent 5, year 6)

> *The fact that well even if I get a low score it was my best I wasn't being lazy and putting no effort in it I did the best I could.*

> (respondent 6, year 6).

4.5. 5 Theme 3: the pressure to achieve in class

In this theme, students discussed how they felt under pressure to achieve a certain standard or level in their school work, not just in relation to SATs or tests. This consisted of two sub-themes: worrying about making mistakes and the pressure of having to work hard all of the time. Areas discussed included issues such as the pressure to achieve a certain amount of work within a set period of time, pressure to complete homework and the feeling of needing a break from the pressure of being in class. Three students expressed concerns about making mistakes or having their work compared to others.

> *Yeah cos everybody else was doing good and they were always like always getting theirs read out or something*

(respondent 9, year 5)

Whilst two other students spoke about how they felt the pressure to produce a certain amount of work during each lesson.

I was trying to get lots of work done but because I was pushing myself too hard I kind of like did a load of spellings wrong and like skipped a couple of pages or something (respondent 9)

Four respondents also reported how the pressure of working in class extended in to homework and they felt under pressure to complete their homework.

Err maybe homework sometimes but I will eventually get it done and then relax (respondent 6)

4.5.6 Theme 4: Social media

In this theme respondents discussed how they experienced social media use. Whilst there were positives discussed in relation to social media these were not identified as a theme as they were not directly related to the research questions. However, it is worth noting that most pupils stated that there were some positives associated with having a mobile or accessing social media or messaging apps. This included being able to contact friends, playing on video games with others, accessing videos and clips on YouTube and being able to contact parents when they were out. Some of these positive aspects formed part of the themes in relation to coping and what pupils did when they were feeling stressed.

However, despite this, there were pressures and associated difficulties experienced in relation to social media which included: people saying inappropriate things online, activities relating to social media taking the place of other activities and interests, arguments taking place online and status being given to those who had a better mobile phone than others.

> *It's just that loads of people will like have all these fancy phones that they brag about it or say everyone look I've got this new phone and I just never really care because it never really social media is never really a thing I cared about* (respondent 6, year 6)

One respondent commented on how arguments over social media apps, such as WhatsApp, could end up getting other people involved.

> *My two friends in the group chat they were having an argument and they asked well who's on whose side and like, that was stressful.*
>
> (respondent 5, year 6).

Three respondents commented on how they had arguments over WhatsApp and how this could cause disagreements to escalate and get worse.

> *Ermm well sometimes I have arguments with someone over it*
>
> (respondent 1, year 6)

> *Sometimes if there is drama in the group chat it is really annoying because other people just want to stay out of it because but because they are in the group they can't so they get involved*
>
> (respondent 5, year 6).

4.5. 7 Theme 5: Difficulties with peer group

This theme relates to problems and difficulties associated with the wider peer group with whom the respondents were not friends with. The distinction between those who were regarded as friends and those who were in the peer group but not seen as friends was quite distinct across all the interviews. Friends were seen as mainly supportive, those people with whom you shared interests and values and with whom there was on the whole little conflict. The wider peer group appeared to represent people who were in the same year group or social circle but who were not similar in relation to how they behaved towards others, the way they approached their work and the attitudes and values they had towards others and their work. At times the wider peer group appeared to be perceived as threatening or at the least they were seen as others to be avoided in order to lessen conflict or potential difficulties.

> *Well of erm I kind of I don't really talk to them a lot and we don't normally contact and yeah if we don't get on together then I just try to stay away. No point trying to get them to like you when they don't. They have obviously made their decision.*

(respondent 8, year 6)

> *So you have like people that are you have people who are good at learning and some people who aren't as good as a group and you have people just in the middle and you have people who like different things and do different things as a group.*

(respondent 5, year 6)

Difficulties with peers seemed to focus on feeling different from the wider group, not liking feeling judged or compared to the wider peer group or feeling that those from different groups may be mean to you. The differences in values and attitudes often seemed to manifest itself in relation to situations where others were not taking the work or lessons as seriously as those who were interviewed did.

> *If they are being disruptive its really annoying to work with them and I want to get on and if I need help then they can't help me. But I can help them but it's not very good only going one way.*

(respondent 5, year 6)

At other times, the behaviour and values of the wider group towards others or towards the respondent themselves appeared to be in conflict to how the respondent's own values and how they felt they should behave.

> *because they are now friends with more serious people but then some people have been like friends with popular people and they feel like because they are now older they feel like it's important to be popular. Erm so they have started acting like the popular people and they are like a bit more like rude.*

(respondent 7, year 5)

However, there was also recognition that the wider peer group were fine once you got to know individuals within the group and that differences between groups was what made people who they are. The third sub-theme

concerned other people being mean to both the respondent and other members of the class. Respondents made comments such as:

> *Erm it is fine but like I feel like sometimes they can be a bit like mean towards others*
>
> *(respondent 7, year 5)*

4.5. 8 Theme 6: Home pressure

The final theme relating to the stresses the children experienced related to things they found stressful at home. Within this theme, four sub-themes were identified: family health, conflict, parental stress and respondents having too much to do when they were at home. The first sub-theme concerned issues relating to family health. This mainly concerned the illness of grandparents, but one respondent also expressed concerns about parental health due to smoking and one respondent spoke about a death of a family member but was reluctant to talk about this in any detail.

> *my grandad has cancer at the moment and might die soon so it's making everyone sad*
>
> (respondent 5, year 6)
>
> *But sometimes I get stressed because my granddad is like always an operation on his back and he's on crutches at the moment and my nan broke her foot they couldn't do anything*
>
> (respondent 7, year 5)

The sub-theme of conflict referred to one respondent's experience of parental divorce. This further explored concerns expressed in the questionnaire where responses to parental divorce had received high ratings of impact from those who had experienced this. In the case of this respondent, it was felt that parents divorcing had not had much of an impact at the time but that it had taken some adjustment when having to settle in to two new houses.

> *Well my parents got divorced when I was quite a young age but I didn't find that much of a trouble like when I was quite young I did like miss them when I was at a different house.*

> (transcript respondent 6, year 6)

Other elements of this theme consisted of sibling arguments, which generally were not seen as stressful and most of the time easily resolved and being compared or having to keep up with the high expectations set by older siblings.

The theme of parental stress referred to one respondent's experiences of her parent suffering from stress at work which meant that her mother was not as available as she would have liked. This sub-theme is included as it highlighted the support that parents can give to support their children with experiencing stress and how difficult it can be for the child when this support is not available for some reason. For this girl, she felt that not having her mum there for some important points in her life, made the stresses she was experiencing feel more challenging.

my mum she's stressed and she's coming home late the past few

days so that makes me a bit upset as I don't get to see her

(respondent 5, year 6)

The last sub-theme was having too much to do and having to manage the different priorities of school, homework. taking part in clubs and activities and making time for other jobs. This aspect was reported as difficult for some of the respondents.

Yeah it's stressful and you have to get everything done and at the

weekends or weekdays and I do clubs every day so it's hard.

(respondent 5, year 6)

Sometimes waking up in the morning and getting all of my things done

does make me feel stressed

(respondent 4, year 5)

Whilst this was a concern for some of those interviewed, others felt that there were ways to balance the conflicting demands and still get things done. In these cases, getting tasks, such as homework, completed quickly and out of the way seemed to be an effective way of managing this.

No. Well sometimes when I am busy when I am like doing something

else and I'm like oh yes I need to do my homework and then I get it

done.

(respondent 8, year 5)

4.5.9 Theme 7: Physical changes

This theme related to one respondent's experience with the physical changes experienced as she was getting older. She reported how this had affected how she felt and that there was some awkwardness with talking to others about what she was experiencing.

:   *Well at my ages you go through lots of changes*

      Interviewer: Do you mean like physical changes?

      Yeah and we sometimes feel that we can't talk to people about them until they go through the same changes

There was a sense of isolation experienced with starting physical changes before others and not being able to talk to others about what she was going though. In addition to this, experiencing these changes alongside other stressors, such as SATs, felt overwhelming for this student.

4.5 Coping strategies

RQ 3: What styles of coping do they use?

Coping responses were analysed as part of the whole of the responses from across the interviews. Four coping themes were identified: support, escape from it all, active coping and avoidance.

4.5.1 Theme 1: Support

The theme of support referred to responses that discussed how the respondents used the support of others to help them feel better when they were stressed. This theme consisted of four sub-themes that related to those

who were regarded as supportive: friendship support, family support, school support and support, or comfort, from pets and teddies or toys.

The theme of friendship support was prevalent across all the interviews and friends were regarded as supportive in a number of areas including supporting with study and SATs, encouraging support in relation to school work, being a protective support in relation to difficulties with other peers and providing emotional support in times of distress. The children's responses indicated that this support was helpful in managing their daily stresses and they relied on their friends being there for them. When apart from their friends, they used social media or mobile phones, to further access this support.

> *Well my friends always kept me encouraged and said it would be ok*
>
> (respondent 1, year 6)

> *Well sometimes my friends advise me on the best way to sort out the*
> *situation and sometimes they come with me to tell the teacher*
>
> (respondent 4, year 5)

> *I think my friends are great they never annoy me they are never*
> *unkind to me not trying to bug me they're nice they are*
> *supportive when it is like tough and they are good company*
>
> (respondent 6, year 6)

At times, friendship support was seen as more beneficial than that of adults particularly when they were in school.

In school I would normally talk to a friend instead of an adult because sometimes I find that the adults don't help.

(respondent 4, year 5)

Support from their family was also highly valued by all of the respondents who would seek advice from their parents as to how to manage stressful or difficult situations, or talk to other members of their extended family. For three respondents, spending time with their family or being at home represented a place where they felt safe and away from the pressures they faced in other aspects of their lives.

Ermm... so if I was worried would talk to someone about how I was feeling, like my family, and then they would help me. Like to forget about it or solve the problem. (respondent 3, year 6)

Erm I do. My nan's the one that I like to talk to because she's really good at hugging and I can just sit with her and chat. (respondent 5, year 6)

There was some distinction between the type of support that the children sought from different adults. Parents were seen as providing more emotional support and were there to discuss more difficult concerns, whereas teachers at school were viewed as being there to support with more academic stresses or demands.

I probably prefer talking about erm more personal stuff with my family (respondent 3, year 6)

The third sub-theme concerned support from teachers at school. This was less prevalent and the support of friends and family appeared to be more valued than teacher support. However, teacher support was regarded as helpful by six of the respondents, often in relation to school work and encouraging them to do well in their work and tests.

> *No not really they were mostly supportive and like telling us not to be stressed about anything instead of pushing us like super hard and making us feel stressed about it. They were like more supportive than stressful, yeah?* (respondent 6, year 6)

> *He just kept encouraging to keep going and try again* (respondent 1, year 6)

Support from pets and teddies was identified as the fourth sub-theme, with seven of the respondents talking about how they spoke to or sought comfort from their pets and teddies when they were feeling stressed. They provided a constant presence for the children and were regarded as always being available. The support they provided was in being there and being able to offer physical comfort or a stable presence for which the children could then talk to with their worries.

> *sometimes I talk to toys or teddies and I've got like this it might be like a bit too young for me but this for every born doll and it's like really realistic and I talk to her. And yeah.* (respondent 7, year 5)

Sometimes I talk to my teddy because I have a massive teddy in my room and he's kind of like he's been there since I was born so I play with my teddies that I have got. (respondent 5, year 6)

4.5.2 Theme 2: Escaping from it all

This theme relates to respondents discussion about removing themselves from the stress in order to have some time taking part in activities that allowed them to think about other things. This was a conscious decision on the part of all of the respondents who actively looked to do things which made them feel better when they were stressed. This theme was divided into the following sub-themes: activities, enjoying nature and being outside and deliberate attempts to remove themselves from the company of others and be alone.

Activities were seen as a good way to take their mind off the stress and also to raise their mood and make themselves feel better. Activities were often related to sport but also included reading, singing and watching funny videos on YouTube or playing video games. These activities were generally regarded as being successful in taking their mind off the stress.

I love doing sport and it is a really nice thing to take your mind off stress it's probably my favourite thing to do (respondent 5, year 6)

if I'm stressed I generally just sit down and go on the computer or something and play a little game by myself or with my friends (respondent 6, year 6)

I just read stuff and then they will go away. (respondent 1, year 6)

Two of the respondents also spent time outside and enjoying nature as a way to remove themselves from the stress. There appeared to be something comforting for the respondents in removing themselves from their immediate environment and spending time outside and appreciating nature.

> *Sometimes I go into the garden and er watch the world go by basically. And watch all of the trees.* (respondent 4, year 5)

> *but when I walk my dog it's nice to get some fresh air because the sun rises erm over the field that we generally walk in and also the sun sets in my window where I go to bed so you can see the sun set in my window which is nice to watch when it is the afternoon and stuff* (respondent 6, year 6)

The final sub-theme is being alone. Seven of the respondents purposefully removed themselves from others and wanted to spend time alone when they were stressed. This was often to their bedroom where they would lie on their bed and try to forget or escape the stress. They would often listen to music and just spend time without having to actively do anything or engage with others.

> *I do like if I'm stressed I generally just lie down on my bed and do whatever on my bed* (respondent 6, year 6)

> *Erm,, I would probably spend time alone. If I was feeling stressed. I would go and spend a bit of time alone.* (respondent 3, year 6)

> *I go to my bedroom and lie on my bed.* (respondent 5, year 6)

4.5.3 Theme 3: Active coping

This theme relates to attempts the respondents made to actively manage the stress in ways they felt would either change the stressor or specifically help them to cope with the situation. The two sub-themes are: problem solving and relaxation strategies.

Problem solving was when the respondents engaged in an active process whereby they attempted to reduce the demands of the stressor in some way. In these cases, they would often try and change how they perceived the situation or engaged in positive self-talk in order to help with how they could deal with the stress. None of the respondents expressed that they tried to change the problem in some way, instead they focused on how they viewed or managed the situation. Other strategies included focusing on pleasant things they could do once they had got the stressful task completed.

> *I do think about those things sometimes but then I think I want to focus on what's happening now and then worry about that when I get to it.* (respondent 4, year 5)

> *I tell myself that at the end I will be proud of myself and that I will have accomplished it in the end so it's like yeah.* (respondent 7, year 5)

> *I would linked to talking to a toy, I would speak it all out in different section with each bit of what happened and then think about what I can do to fix it* (respondent 4, year 5)

The second sub-theme concerned relaxation strategies that the children used which help them feel calmer in stressful situations such as taking deep

breaths or engaging in meditation or mindfulness type thinking. Some of these had been taught informally by parents or other adults and were being tried out by the children.

> *I sometimes meditate because my friend does meditation and my aunt goes to Yoga and meditation and so I do stuff with them* (respondent 5, year 6)

> *Erm just like to take deep breaths.... was just walking up and down. I was pacing. I do a lot of pacing* (respondent 8, year 5)

4.5.4 Theme 4: Avoidance

This theme relates to the respondents trying to forget or avoid the stress in a less proactive way. In these cases, they would hope that the stress would go away or wish they could think of something else. During these times, they would not actively try and do something to take their mind off it or feel better but just hope that they would feel better in some way. Where they could, they may try and avoid the situation which was causing them stress but this was not always possible in the cases of situation such as SATs and tests.

> *at the weekend (pause) I wish that the stress or problem would go away because that is just easier but I know that you have to go through that. I I try to forget about it all the time because it is better.* (respondent 5, year 6)

> *Erm (pause) staying in bed longer than usual I do that* (respondent 3, year 6)

4.6 Summary of results

In summary, the responses from the questionnaires indicated that children perceived family stresses as being more stressful than the other stresses experienced. The themes of home or family stress was followed up with the qualitative findings which indicated that family stresses related to concerns about the health of family members, conflict within the family, parents experiencing stress and having too much to do within the home environment. This was followed by stresses relating to friendships and peer group. Stresses relating to school work and taking SATS and tests were rated as the next stressful by the questionnaire respondents. This included, across both themes, stresses associated with the pressure to do well and achieve certain levels or grades. Stress responses related to friends centred more on the wider peer group than related to established or secure friendships which were regarded as more supportive than stressful. Responses from the questionnaire data and from the interviews did not report that the children found transitions, such as residential trips or the transition to secondary school, as highly stressful. However, the theme of experiencing stress in relation to physical changes experienced was identified as a stressor in the interview data.

Data from both the quantitative and qualitative findings indicated that the children used a fairly wide range of coping strategies. The types of strategies they used, and the possible effectiveness of these in mediating the stresses experienced, will be further discussed in the next chapter.

5 Discussion

The current research aimed to find out what children in years 5-6 experience as stressful in their daily lives and examine the coping strategies they use to manage this stress. The findings presented in chapter 4 describe the experiences of the children from this current study. This chapter discusses the findings in the light of current research on childhood stress and refers to literature in relation to further themes that were identified as part of the findings.

An integrated discussion of both the quantitative and qualitative findings will be presented in relation to the research questions with consideration as to how this links to the conceptual framework. Following this, implications for EP practice will be considered. The chapter concludes by outlining the strengths and limitations of this current study alongside further considerations for future research.

5.1 Summary of main findings

Previous research has suggested that children are experiencing increased rates of mental health conditions because of the stresses they are experiencing in their daily lives (Compas et al., 2001; Byrne, et al., 2011). Little research has been conducted to explore the nature of the stresses children experience and how they cope with this. Furthermore, there is limited research in this area using children's views to explore this issue and the research that has been conducted has often taken place outside of the UK. Therefore, this current study aimed to explore the current picture of children's experience of stress and coping within a UK sample.

5.2 Overview of the main findings

This study highlights the stressors that children are experiencing in their daily lives and the differences between the types of stressors that are perceived as stressful. The quantitative arm of this study found out that children are experiencing stresses relating to relationships, both family and peers, more stressful than those relating to school and academic work. Gender differences were noted with girls experiencing more stress in some areas than boys. Gender differences were also identified in relation to the coping strategies used by boys and girls. The qualitative arm of this study indicated that stresses relating to family and peers, whilst being experienced less, were often perceived as more stressful than academic and school related stressors. Furthermore, there were some differences between the coping strategies that children used with some children selecting more adaptive and helpful coping strategies, while others chose strategies which may be seen as being less helpful in managing the stressors they face. Taken together this suggests that children are experiencing more stress in relation to interpersonal stressors and that these are experienced more keenly than academic and school related stressors. Furthermore, some children are often using strategies which may be less helpful in managing a wide range of stresses.

5.2.1 RQ1: What types of stressors do children in years 5-6 experience on a daily basis?

Family stress

The findings from the questionnaire indicated that family life stressors were rated as more stressful than the other stressors for both boys and girls. This finding contradicts some previous research on identifying childhood stressors which found that children reported more stressful experiences relating to school and peer pressure (Sotardi, 2017).

Quantitative and qualitative data from the questionnaires suggested that stresses related to family life were experienced as more upsetting than stresses relating to school work or SATs. Whilst many children did not experience high levels of stress in relation to family life, when children did they often rated these stressors as being very upsetting to them. Stressors rated as more distressing or upsetting included parental divorce, worrying that something bad may happen to their family, someone close being ill and pets being ill or dying. Items related to sibling arguments and being in trouble were rated as being less upsetting or stressful.

Research on childhood stress suggests that whilst the cumulative experience of daily hassles can be upsetting for children to experience, significant stressful events, such as divorce or death, are experienced as highly stressful for children. Experiencing parental divorce was one item on the questionnaire that most of those who experienced it (22%) rated as highly distressing. Experiencing divorce can encompass a range of negative

experiences for children including a decline in parental support and control, loss of contact with one parent and increased conflict between parents (Amato, 2000). Following divorce other lifestyle changes may come into effect such as moving house or schools and sometimes a decline in economic resources (Amato, 2000). The interview of one child provided some further insight into experiencing divorce, discussing how moving home had temporarily felt strange. However, in this case, the respondent felt that having the support and contact with both his parents during this process helped. This highlights protective factors, such as parental support and resources, that can help children to manage these stressful situations (Amato, 2000).

The other highly rated items also included the more significant life events that concerned family health and wellbeing. Experiencing the illness or death of someone close has been rated as highly upsetting for children in previous research which has used child reports to determine the impact of potential stressors on children (Dise-Lewis, 1988). In Dise-Lewis's study, experiencing the death of a parent or close family member was rated as highly stressful and were regarded as trauma or crisis experiences whereas less highly rated items were seen more as the "daily hassles" type of stresses which were experienced more frequently but rated as less distressing (Dise-Lewis, 1988). This is reflected in the current research. However, two items which were experienced as upsetting that have not been found in previous research relate to worrying about something bad happening and the death of a pet.

Research into children's worrying and anxiety suggests that children are experiencing an increase in anxiety and worry, especially in relation to family concerns (Pienaar & Johnston, 2018). Whilst this may not relate directly to the stressors that children are experiencing, this increase in worry and anxiety about bad things happening may be related to a greater awareness, through forums such as social media, or the portrayal of bad things happening in the press.

These findings relate to some of the earlier work on stress research, such as that by Coddington (1972), which examined the impact of more severe life stresses rather than the daily life hassles approach. Later research has also indicated that family life stress can be viewed as a significant stressor for children within this age group (Escobar et al., 2013). Family stressors such as divorce, relationship breakdown and parental conflict are major stressors for children (Garmezy, 1991) and this is reflected in the findings from this research where children commented on the impact of parental divorce and also illness of a family member.

In terms of how stressful events are perceived, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) stated that the appraisal of an event can determine how stressful an event is. This can be dependent on how the event is appraised by the individual, which is related to the implications this has on a person's wellbeing (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). This suggests that in the case of family, children may perceive stresses related to family as more impactful to their wellbeing than stressors associated with school or peers.

In addition to this, some research suggests that children in this age group have learnt successful ways to manage academic related stress but are still reliant on family support in order to help them manage the stresses they face (Sotardi, 2017). Therefore, when stress occurs within the family unit, children of this age may not have appropriate coping strategies to manage this stress and are also experiencing an additional loss of their existing support network.

Friendship stress

The findings from the questionnaire data indicated that friendships stress was perceived as more upsetting than stresses relating to SATs and tests and school work. There were however gender differences relating to this which will be discussed in the next section. This suggests that after family stress, children are experiencing stress relating to friendships as more stressful than stress relating to their work at school. The items on the questionnaire relating to friendships also included children's experiences of relating to other children who were not necessarily their friends and this distinction became more apparent in the interviews with the nine children selected.

Themes identified from the interview data suggested that all of the children in the sample received support and positive benefits from their friendships but that they did experience difficulties when having to manage difficulties with the wider peer group. This included difficulties such as: other children being mean to them or calling them unkind names, not fitting in with the popular activities that others enjoyed and being left out or feeling different from others. Difficulties relating to friendships related to falling out with friends or

shifting or changing friendships. Information from the interviews also indicated difficulties with the wider peer group with children reporting that they experienced difficulties when working with others in class, having different values to others in the class and fear of being judged by those in the wider peer group.

The findings from this section reflect some similar findings from previous research that indicates that social situations are more problematic than learning situations for children in this age group (Sotardi, 2017). Previous research suggests that children commonly report peer difficulties such as being teased or being turned away from the group as stressful experiences (Sandstrom, 2011) and this was consistent in this research. Experiencing difficulties with peer relationships in childhood has been associated with considerable distress in childhood, anxiety and loneliness (Sandstrom, 2011). Peer relationships have an impact on the wellbeing of children especially in middle childhood as being accepted by peers is a social need with some evidence suggesting that negative experience with peers is related to poorer outcomes in later childhood and adolescence (Wang, Williams, Shahaeian,& Harrison, 2018).

 Given this and the impact that peer stress appeared to have on the children in this sample it is important to think about ways in which children can learn to manage their peer relationships and any difficulties they face with these. There is some evidence to suggest that children of this age group have better coping strategies for managing difficulties with coping with academic stresses than they do when managing social or relational stresses (Sotardi, 2017) and there is considerable variation in how children cope with these

peer related stresses (Sandstrom, 2011). Coping with peer related stresses can be dependent on skills such as social competence and communication skills whereas coping with academic stress can be managed by using problem solving approaches (Zimmer-Gembeck, 2011). Additionally, interpersonal stress, both family and peer related, can be perceived as being more uncontrollable than academic or work related stress which can be seen to be managed more easily; this may have an impact on the effectiveness of the coping strategy selected (Hempel & Peterman, 2005). Whilst this may be beyond the scope of this current research, it may be interesting to further explore how children of this age cope with the difference in academic and interpersonal stressors.

Social Media

Two items relating to social media were included within the friendship stress variable on the questionnaire. These were related to people saying bad things about them on social media and not being allowed on social media when their peers were. Most of the sample (75%) had not experienced people saying unkind things about them on social media and this did not appear to be a stressor within this sample. Likewise, most (58%) of the children had not experienced not being able to use social media when their peers did. Where this had occurred it was not rated as stressful by many of the children.

However, thematic analysis from the interviews indicated that stress related to social media was present for the children from the interview sample. This included difficulties with activities relating to social media taking over or

detracting from other activities, becoming involved in arguments on social media and being aware that there were people who engaged in inappropriate activities online. Other concerns relating to social media concerned group chats taking up a lot of time and the status relating to having the latest phone or technology. This may be due to the selection of the children for the sample, with those children who consented to take part being more affected by some of the stressors indicated in the questionnaire. Another reason may be due to the questionnaire items on social media being irrelevant to the concerns experienced as stressful for the children.

Research into children's use of social media is still developing but it is known that using social media is one of the most common activities in childhood today (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011). Using social media can have benefits for children including: enhancing communication, social and technical skills (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011) and this was reflected in the qualitative analysis of the questionnaire and interview data but not included as a theme as it did not relate directly to the research questions. However, there is now growing evidence of the negative impact of social media on children, which mostly relates to peer to peer risks such as bullying or conflict online (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011). Whilst none of the children in this sample reported online bullying, they did report that conflict over social media was difficult and could take a long time to resolve. The research also reflects the findings of social media use taking up time from other activities with some research suggesting that children who spent more time online experienced more feelings of sadness than those who didn't (Pea et al., 2010).

Academic stress

Academic stress was less endorsed on the questionnaires than stresses relating to family and peer stress yet it was still viewed as a significant stressor being rated higher than growing up stress. Stress relating to school work, rather than SATs and tests, was seen as more stressful. The pressures relating to academic concerns related to children feeling that they had to perform at their best and at a certain level and that the time spent in the class was very focused with an emphasis on producing high quality work within a certain time frame.

Stresses related to academic pressures have been found to be a primary concern for children of this age group (Sotardi, 2017). In previous research by Sotardi (2016 & 2017) in children of this age group, academic stressors were rated as a primary stressor, being perceived as more stressful than peer relationships. However, not all research into childhood stresses have found that academic stress is perceived as more stressful than other stressors (Byrne et al., 2011). In research by Byrne et al. (2011), school related difficulties were reported as less stressful than events that were perceived as being out of control such as family or friendship difficulties.

Inconsistencies in findings may be partly explained by the different measures used and by differences of the geographic locations of the two studies. Despite the growing concern about the impact of the pressures of the schooling system putting children under pressure these findings suggest that whilst school and test stress are experienced as stressful, interpersonal stressors are more highly rated. This may be explained by the age of the

children in this current sample, as some research suggests that children of this age have better coping mechanisms for dealing with academic related stresses, such as using problem solving approaches (Sotardi, 2017). Data from the interviews suggested that in some cases, children were using active ways to manage their academic demands, such as having study groups at home, thereby drawing upon the social support of others and improving the situation by increasing their competence in a subject.

Another possible explanation is that the nature of academic pressure is appraised as being more controlled and expected (Compas, Malcarne & Fonadacaro, 1988) than social pressures. Children are made aware of the process and know what to expect and therefore, they feel more in control and competent at managing these stresses. This is consistent with previous research by Byrne et al. (2011) which found that children manage expected and more controllable stressors better than those which appear out of their control. Additionally, the information from the interview data suggested that the children in this sample felt that the practice and preparation for SATs was helpful in knowing how to take the tests. This was not included as a theme as it was not seen as directly related to the stresses they faced but it is worth noting that children found the practice helpful in reducing anxiety related to tests as they knew what to expect and felt competent with answering the questions.

However, this is not to say that children did not experience academic stress and where they did it concerned pressures related to performing and achieving well in academic tasks and their performance in relation to that of their peers. The importance of doing well in school was also regarded as a

pressure with all the children from the interviews stating that they wanted to do well and achieve their best. Pressure to do well appears to be perceived as achieving certain grades and levels, rather than on learning content in relation to achieving skills and mastery. Therefore, the pressure to achieve appeared to be more outcome based than learning for a reason, which may increase the sense of pressure that children felt in relation to the academic work. This in part, may reflect the focus of the education system and the emphasis on testing and performance (Putwain, 2008).

Gender differences between stressors

The findings indicated that there was a difference between the stressors experienced by boys and girls, with girls experiencing more stress in relation to SATs and tests and friendships stressors. This is consistent with other research on stress that indicates that males and females experience stress differently (Burkhart, et al., 2017). Females tend to experience stress relating to friendships and relationships while males experience more stresses relating to work (Burkhart et al., 2017; Sharrer & Ryan-Wenger, 1995).

The girls in this sample reported more peer related stress than boys which is consistent with other research where girls perceive peer pressures as more stressful than boys (Washburn-Ormachea, Hillman, & Sawilowsky, 2004). However there is some suggestion that boys are less willing to admit or talk about interpersonal stress (Washburn-Ormachea, Hillman, & Sawilowsky, 2004), something which was reflected in the interview data. The data suggested that boys were less likely to talk about stressors related to friendships or peers, reporting that friendships were seen as relatively trouble

free. Where problems did occur, boys appeared to find it easier to ignore the issue or report that it did not matter to them. Whereas girls reported that more difficulties with managing some of the difficulties associated with the wider peer group.

Whilst previous research indicates that boys report more stress than girls in relation to academic pressures (Washburn-Ormachea, Hillman, & Sawilowsky, 2004) this was not reflected in this study where girls reported more stress in relation to tests than boys. However, research indicates that generally girls report higher levels of intensity and frequency to stress experienced (Compas, Malcarne, & Fondacaro, 1988) and this may reflect why girls were experiencing more stresses in relation to this than boys. Another point to consider is whether the interpersonal aspect of achievement was appraised as more stressful for girls. Girls report more stress relating to interpersonal pressure, and some of the responses from the interviews suggested that girls were more aware of pleasing parents and teachers than boys. The boys interviewed felt that trying their best and getting good grades was important whereas for girls, or one girl in particular, doing well to please parents and teachers was expressed as a concern. This may also be explained by the selection of children chosen from the sample or by the increased pressure that is exerted on children at school. Additionally, it may be explained by research which suggests that girls use more emotional approaches coping strategies than boys (Hempel & Peterman, 2005), which are less effective when coping with academic stresses (Hempel & Peterman, 2005).

5.2.2 RQ2: How do children cope with these stressors?

Gender differences

The quantitative results from the questionnaire indicated that there were gender differences relating to how the children managed the stresses they encountered. Boys were more likely to play computer games when they felt stressed than girls. Coping strategies have been categorised into two approaches: problem solving and emotional focused (Compas et al., 2001). Playing computer games could be classed as an emotional approach to coping, as this includes using activities to distract or avoid thinking about the stressors to make the person feel better when they are experiencing stress (Reinecke, 2009). This approach to coping does not attempt to change the situation being experienced in any way but focuses on managing the person's emotional reaction to the stressor. Within this approach, several sub-themes of coping have emerged including avoidance and distraction (Compas et al., 2001). Both of these approaches can be viewed as disengagement coping (Compas et al., 2001) whereby the person experiencing the stress takes active attempts to disengage thinking about or managing the stressor (Compas et al., 2001). The effectiveness of such an approach has been questioned as there is some suggestion that there is a distinction between trying to avoid thinking about the stressor and actively distracting oneself with another activity. In the case of avoiding thinking about the stressor, experimental studies have shown that this can increase negative thoughts and increase distress (Compas et al., 2001) whereas

actively distracting oneself is associated with lower levels of distress and less intrusive thoughts (Compas et al., 2001).

There has been little research relating to the effectiveness of playing computer games in order to manage stress in children but there is emerging evidence that playing computer games can help improve mood in adults when they are feeling stressed (Reinecke, 2009). It has been suggested that playing computer games provides the same release from anxiety or stress provoking stimuli that physical activities provide (Reinecke, 2009). Further research is needed in this area in relation to childhood coping and the effectiveness of playing computer games to manage stress.

Information provided in the qualitative sections from the questionnaires indicated that children did find playing computer games provided a temporary release from thinking about the stresses they were feeling and this, alongside other uses of technology for managing stress, was widely used across the sample. This included accessing videos and games as a means of distraction as well as using phones or technology to access support of friends.

Data from both the questionnaire and qualitative responses, indicated that girls were more likely to talk to a teddy or toy as a means of coping than boys, with none of the boys from the interview sample stating that they would talk to a teddy or toy. Talking to a teddy or toy appeared to provide the girls with a way of expressing their emotional responses to a figure who was always there and available. Girls are more likely to use emotional expression to cope when feeling stressed (Sharrer & Ryan-Wenger, 1995) which may be

why they accessed this support in this way more than boys. The appeal of a toy or teddy as a transitional object can provide children with emotional support, affection and social support (Triebenbacher,1998).

Girls were more likely to talk to friends or message on the phone 'a lot' than boys. In relation to talking to friends on the phone, this is consistent with other research that suggests that girls use social support strategies more than boys (Sharrer & Ryan-Wenger, 1995) and emerging evidence about the use of accessing social support online (Leung, 2007). There is little evidence relating to gender differences of children using social media online for coping but research suggests that females are using social media, such as Snapchat and Instagram, more than boys (Kashahara, Houlihan, & Estrada, 2019) which may reflect the increase in use of mobile phones in accessing social support. Data from the interviews did not expand on this area as only two of the respondents in this sample used their mobile phones to contact friends in this way but this may be due to the characteristics of those in this current sample who appeared to view social media in less positive ways. One respondent did use her mobile phone to access the support of her friends and stated that it helped her when she was not able to meet her friends in person to talk about stresses, most notably test and school work pressures.

Support from friends

Friendships as a source of support and coping was a theme identified within the qualitative analysis with boys and girls citing their friends as helpful when coping with stress. Children's use of support in coping with a range of

stressors has been shown to vary dependent on the stressor being experienced (Pincus & Friedman, 2004) and the use of social support increases, for both girls and boys, as they develop towards adolescence (Pincus & Friedman, 2004) and become less reliant on the support of adults.

The interviews indicated some gender differences with how boys and girls drew on the support of their friends in different ways. Boys were more likely to engage in shared activities with friends as a way to take their mind off the stress whereas girls were more likely to talk to friends about their problems or engage in activities which could help reduce the stress such as setting up study groups or talking about their worries. This is consistent with evidence which suggests that girls are more likely to use emotional expression, such as talking about their feelings, than boys when dealing with stress (Sharrer & Ryan-Wenger, 1995). In contrast, boys have been found to use more physical oriented strategies than girls, such as sport or exercise (Sharrer & Ryan-Wenger, 1995). The shared activities that the boys in the interviews discussed often included playing football with their friends or spending time outside at the park with their friends.

Imagination and escape

The theme of imagination and escape was identified as a prevalent theme within the qualitative data analysis of the responses to the open questions on the questionnaire. This related to responses where the children would avoid or escape from the stress by either reading or engaging in imaginative processes or games whereby they could escape from the stress. This was

only referred during one interview but was not regarded as prevalent enough across the interviews to remain as a theme in this analysis.

Evidence suggests that play is an essential human function and helps us to learn how to handle the world (Smith, 1995) with imaginative play being considered one element within the construct of play. Play has been shown to support children's development in skills such as problem solving and pretend play (imaginative play) has a profound effect on children's social and affective development (Smith, 1995). Whilst some of the children's responses did not directly relate to playing they did relate to using their imagination as a way to remove themselves from the problems or stresses they were facing.

The use of imagination and pretence can help children to move forward and realise their goals (Taylor, Pham, Rivkin, & Amor, 1998) and to come up with some ways in which they can solve the problems they are encountering. Imagination can tap into the social and affective channels of coping and resiliency (Berger & Lahad, 2010) thereby providing individuals with resources that allows them to cope with traumatic or stressful events. Within this study, some of the children did engage in imaginative processes which enabled them to find temporary release from the problems they were encountering.

Nature and being outside

One theme which was identified from the qualitative analysis was children taking themselves somewhere outside to appreciate nature or being outside as a way to remove themselves from the stress. This was identified from the questionnaire and interview data. This was not reported on the quantitative

section of the questionnaire as this was not given as an option on the closed questions of the questionnaire which highlights the advantages of using a mixed methods approach to research in an area which is exploratory in nature.

There has been some research into developing green space and the use of nature in helping to reduce stress and increase resilience in children (Chawla, Keena, Pevec, & Stanley, 2014). Some researchers state that it has been a failure of research on stress and coping to acknowledge the role of nature on coping due to the medical models and historical context that stress research has originated from (Chawla et al., 2014). It was not a coping strategy that came up during the literature review on children and coping but was a theme that emerged from the children's responses.

Research by Chawla et al. (2014) suggests that work on creating supportive environments for children to cope with stress could be more beneficial than focusing on approaches that emphasise the role of the individual in learning how to manage and cope with stressors. This highlights the importance of focusing on the environments which surround the child in addition to the individual characteristics that may influence appraisal and coping approaches. Current stress research on managing stress within childhood has typically emphasised individual approaches yet research suggests that enhancing environmental factors such as social connectedness can be beneficial in reducing and coping with stress (Chawla et al., 20014). In research by Chawla et al., (2014) children who were in middle childhood spoke about how they experienced peace and calm when being outside in green space.

This reflects what the children in the current sample reported that they found the peace and respite from stress when outside and appreciating nature.

Use of technology

Responses from the quantitative and qualitative data on the questionnaire indicated that children used technology, in the form of computer games, watching videos on YouTube and playing on their phones, as a way of distracting themselves from the stresses they were experiencing. There is some emerging evidence that using the Internet and watching television can enhance mood and reduce the negative impact of stress (Leung, 2007). In the same research by Leung (2007), it was suggested that when under stress individuals will gravitate towards funny material in an attempt to improve their mood. The qualitative responses on the questionnaires illustrated this with many children reporting that watching funny videos on YouTube took their mind off the stress. This was confirmed in one interview where the respondent stated that it made the worry or stress go away when you were laughing. Further research by Leung (2007) suggested that different stressors are associated with using the internet as a coping strategy. This includes some stressors (parental and school related problems) being associated with adolescents use of social media to access social support from others.

However, not all of the research on coping and technology has found such a positive impact of this approach to coping. There is some suggestion that the use of social media as a coping tool is a way to avoid the stress or worry that they are encountering (Harmon, 2017). Avoidance as a coping approach has

been shown to have poor outcomes in some situations. In research by Harmon (2017), those who used social media as a coping tool experienced more internalising and externalising behaviours (Harmon, 2017).

5.2.3 RQ3: What styles of coping do they use?

Different styles of coping

Children employ a range of coping styles to manage the demands of different stressors (Band & Weisz, 1988). Styles of coping change in relation to the stressors experienced and the age of the child involved (Band & Weisz, 1988). The effectiveness of the coping strategy selected can be dependent on the situation in which the child finds themselves and the stressor they are experiencing (Band & Weisz, 1988). Coping refers to all efforts to mediate the distress caused by the stressor (Compas et al., 2001) with effective strategies being ones that alleviate the distress caused by the stressor and have better long term outcomes, including better mental health outcomes, being labelled as adjusted or adaptive strategies (de Boo & Wicherts, 2009). Maladaptive or maladjusted strategies refer to attempts to alleviate the distress of the stressor that are ineffective or are associated with negative outcomes such as those which increase the risk of children experiencing mental health conditions (de Boo & Wicherts, 2009).

Whilst there is not one coping approach that can be advocated as effective across all stressors (Compas et al., 2001), certain coping styles and strategies can be seen as more helpful in the long term than others. Whilst there is a lack of consensus in this area (Compas et al., 2017) coping that relates to problem solving approaches are often associated with better

outcomes than other strategies (Compas et al., 2001). In addition to this,

strategies that are directed towards altering one's response to the stressor, if

the nature of the stressor cannot be altered, can also been seen as helpful

(Compas et al., 2001). This includes drawing upon the support of others,

expressing emotional responses to the stressor, taking on activities that

distract from thinking about the stressor and attempts to control physical

responses to the stressor through relaxation strategies. In order to answer

the research question, children's responses are discussed in relation to

current research on what is currently regarded as adaptive or maladaptive

coping.

Adaptive coping

Support

Responses on the questionnaire indicated that children from this sample did

use support as a coping strategy. Responses indicated that children talked to

members of their family the most (85%) whilst talking to a friend was used by

74% of the sample. Other responses related to support included spending

time with friends (90%) and talking to friends on the phone or messaging

friends which was used by 59% of the sample.

This was reflected in the themes identified from both the open questionnaires

and the interviews where support from friends and family was seen as

important by the children in the sample. This is consistent with research on

coping in middle childhood whereby children of this age often express their

concerns as a way of managing their emotional responses to stress (Sotardi,

2017). Most children in this sample chose to speak with an adult about their

stresses but spending time with friends was also seen as a good way to manage stress.

The responses from the questionnaire indicate that more children would talk to a member of their family than a friend when they felt stressed. This possibly reflects the developmental stage that the children of this sample as children of this age still use their parents primarily for support with stress but begin to move towards expanding their support network as they approach adolescence (Sotardi, 2017).

Most children reported using these strategies at some point which suggests that the children from this sample were able to employ adaptive strategies on occasions and utilised an existing support network which helped them manage their stress.

Relaxation attempts

Quantitative data showed that strategies for deliberate attempts to regulate their emotional response to a situation (taking deep breaths) were also used by the majority (70%) of the sample. Information from the qualitative analysis showed a wider range of strategies that children used to help themselves feel more relaxed when they were stressed. This included engaging in mindfulness, meditation or breathing or calming exercises. Some of the children had been taught these approaches by adults at home or had experienced some teaching of this in school. It is interesting to note that they were able to use and apply these strategies in their daily lives, something which may be considered for future interventions in the classroom.

Problem solving approaches

One limitation of the questionnaire was that it did not contain any items relating to problem solving approaches to coping. However, qualitative responses indicated that the children used some problem solving approaches to manage stressful situations. This included strategies such as thinking about ways in which they could change the situation is some way; breaking the situation in to smaller parts and dealing with each part at a time. In addition to this, children also used cognitive appraisal to help them to manage how they perceived the situation, for example telling themselves it will be worth it in the end or that the stress will have a positive goal which will make it worthwhile in the long term. This indicates that some of the children were aware and able to use coping strategies that are associated with better outcomes when managing stress.

Distraction

Earlier models of coping differentiated between two styles of coping: problem solving and emotional approaches to coping (de Boo & Wicherts, 2009) in which avoidance and distraction were seen as being an emotional approach to coping and therefore less effective than problem solving coping (de Boo & Wicherts, 2009). Although there are many similarities between these two constructs recent research has begun to focus on the distinction and difference between distraction and avoidance (Compas et al., 2017). Whereas avoidance is associated with being less adaptive to manage stress, distraction strategies are being regarded as a helpful way of managing stress.

However, as models of coping have evolved, and evidence suggests that the two are separate constructs it is important that this is differentiated in measuring children's coping strategies (Compas et al., 2001). Distraction strategies relate to efforts to engage in distracting thoughts and activities in order to distract from the stressors being experienced (de Boo & Wicherts, 2009). Activities relating to distraction often involve physical activities or sport (de Boo & Wicherts, 2009) or can also include activities such as watching television or playing a game (Sharrer & Ryan-Wenger, 1995). Whilst the evidence is mixed, it is now thought that distraction coping can offer better outcomes than avoidance coping as distraction strategies involve shifting attention away from the stressor towards more positive engagement in activities (Compas et al., 2001) which has been associated with better long term outcomes (Compas et al., 2001).

Distraction was a common approach reflected in both quantitative and qualitative findings. Quantitative data showed that most children would distract themselves by taking part in an activity that they enjoyed although the exact nature of this activity was not specified. Distraction in the form of taking part in a sport was also used by over half (68%) of the children in the study. Distraction as a coping style was also identified in the qualitative analysis with children engaging in sports or active physical activity outside such as playing football or being on the trampoline. Other distraction activities included reading, listening to music, singing, playing computer or video games and taking part in arts and crafts.

Support from adults

Support from adults is regarded as an important coping strategy for children in middle childhood (Sotardi, 2017) with children of this age group often seeking adult support for a range of stresses and difficulties. As children of this age become older they become more adept at selecting from a wider range of coping strategies but having parents to support can be helpful as children learn to manage their own stress (Pincus & Friedman, 2004).

Family

In this current study, family support consisted of a wide range of approaches that encompassed a range of different ways to support their children with alleviating the distress of the stressors experienced including emotional regulation, problem solving and distraction strategies. One way in which family support helped was by supporting the children with emotional regulation in response to the stressor (Compas et al., 2017). Learning to regulate emotional responses to stress is an important part of the coping process (Compas et al., 2017) and emotional release, through talking to others, can be an effective way of doing this (Compas et al., 2017).

In this current study, some children (54%) children often spoke to their parents, or other adult members of their extended family, about the stresses they experienced, providing them with an effective way of emotional release. Data from the interviews reported that children often felt more comfortable talking to their parents or family about stresses related to peer or interpersonal stresses but would talk to teachers at school about matters relating to academic pressures. Parents could further support with emotional

regulation by providing physical comfort and reassurance by giving their child a hug or providing a safe space.

Family support also consisted of family members suggesting ways in which the children could learn how to manage the stresses they experienced. This included being taught relaxation strategies such as breathing or meditation or being supported with problem solving approaches such as breaking the problem down in to smaller parts and focusing on one part at a time. Other support from parents included practical suggestions or making arrangements to help resolve the problem. Finally, activities carried out with family members provided some of the children with ways to take their minds off the stress (cognitive distraction) by engaging with a more positive activity.

Teacher support

Less children reported that they would talk to an adult at school (58%) than they would talk to their parents or another family member with only 7% reporting that they would talk to a teacher frequently about the stresses they were experiencing. Information from the interviews suggested that some children felt uncertain about talking to teachers individually about their difficulties whilst others felt that the teachers' help would not be sufficient or helpful. The children's responses from the interviews suggested that they knew teacher support was there but they would not ask for help unless it was necessary or important. In this study, they were more likely to ask friends or family for support.

These findings are inconsistent with other research on children's coping in school, whereby children seek teacher support as a form of relief from the

stressors they are facing (Sotardi, 2017). In Sotardi's research pupils reported that teacher personality and jokes provided light relief from the stresses of the classroom. This was not reported by any of the children in this current study. However, teachers were not seen as a source of stress and were regarded as being present in the background of the children's daily lives but were rarely sought to use to support with problems or issues experienced at school.

This could be explained by the fact that as children grow older they become more adept at utilising their own coping strategies and are less reliant on the support of adults (Pincus & Friedman, 2004). Research also suggests that children employ more problem based approaches when dealing with academic stresses, such as school work and tests. Therefore, if they were experiencing these stressors they may have strategies in place to manage these stresses without needing to access teacher support. Furthermore, the children in this sample did not report academic stresses as stressful as peer and family stresses which may mean they were feeling less stressed in areas whereby they may speak to a teacher. The stresses they reported as being more stressful were more of an interpersonal nature, which may, as one respondent suggested, be something they would feel more comfortable talking to an adult at home about.

Maladaptive coping

Maladaptive coping styles refer to approaches to coping which do not help the person to mediate the negative effects of the stressor or increase negative outcomes. Avoidance is often associated with poorer outcomes as it

has been shown to increase distress and negative thoughts (Compas et al., 2001). The responses on both the questionnaire and interviews indicate that avoidance was used as a coping approach by the children. Avoidance took the form of wishing that the problem would go away, spending longer in bed or asleep than usual or being by themselves and removing themselves from the company of others. Whilst these strategies may provide some temporary release from the demands of the stressor evidence suggests that in the longer term they can increase distress and are associated with poorer outcomes from mental health (Compas et al., 2001).

Eating and sleeping

Another strategy that the children used which was identified from the qualitative data was eating food when they felt stressed in order to feel better. This had not been anticipated and was therefore not included as an item on the questionnaire and had not been identified during the researching and piloting phase of the questionnaire.

Two themes which occurred in both the interviews and questionnaires concerned children avoiding or escaping from the stress by eating or sleeping. Both of these strategies could be considered to be distraction or avoidance as they show attempts to avoid thinking about the stressor by providing a temporary release from the emotional distress that the respondent is facing. Whereas distraction refers to taking one's mind off by engaging in a positive activity, eating and sleeping appear to represent more of a wish to avoid having to think about the stressor.

There has been some research into childhood obesity and the levels of stress that children experience with those children who experience more stress showing higher levels of childhood obesity (Aparcio, Canals, Arija, De Henauw & Michels, 2016). This research suggests that this can be partly due to maladaptive coping strategies that involve consuming food to relieve the emotional responses to experiencing stress (Aparcio et al., 2016) and having less time or motivation to engage in healthy eating and physical activities such as sport (van Jaarsveld et al., 2009). Furthermore, some emerging evidence suggests that experiencing stress can increase the desire, through the release of the hormone Cortisol, for consuming sweet and fatty foods (Aparcio et al., 2016) which in turn can provide a temporary release from the feelings associated with stress and other negative emotions. It is interesting to note that the children in this sample often reported eating sweet food in response to feeling stressed. Further research has also associated other behavioural effects of experiencing stress, such as reduced physical activity or an increase in screen time, which can further exacerbate the effects of eating too much food (Michels et al., 2015) and increase conditions such as childhood obesity. The findings of this current research suggest that some children did use food and activities such as watching videos on YouTube as a way of reducing the negative feelings associated with stress.

The current research also suggests that children should be taught more adaptive coping strategies at an earlier age that do not rely on food to relieve emotional discomfort. This could include other ways to reduce the emotional discomfort associated with stress such as interventions like mindfulness

(Aparcio et al., 2016) and increasing physical activity in the form of sport or other physical activities (Michels at al., 2015.)

5.3 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is an important part of qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013) and relates to the process of critically reflecting on the knowledge we produce and how we produce this knowledge. This includes having a critical reflection on one's own role in the process of the research and considering how this may have an impact on the knowledge created (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

In relation to this research, the researcher was aware of the need for reflexivity at each stage of the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This included considering how the researcher's own views, including the topic area and the design selected, shaped the research from the beginning of the process (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This included further reflections on how the researchers own personal views impacted on the interpretation of the findings (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018).

In order to take this into account, ensuring transparency and clarity, regular supervision, including peer supervision, enabled a more objective stance to the analysis and interpretation of the data. This included having the initial codes checked by a colleague for a selection of the transcripts and checking and reviewing the themes during supervision and with colleagues.

5.4 Implications for EP practice

1. As this research found family stresses to be highly prevalent, support could be given to children as to how to cope with stresses in this area. EPs could offer material and resources for schools which support children with learning how to cope with stresses within the family. In addition to this, EPs could work with parents to highlight how they could support their children when managing with difficulties at home.

2. Family stresses were found to be more upsetting to children especially when they involved a traumatic event such as parents divorcing or the death of a family member. EPs could support schools with work which enables children experiencing significant stresses such as providing workshops for parents, signposting to specific services and making schools aware of how they could support these children in school, for example having a trusted adult they could talk to or safe spaces they could go to.

3. Stresses related to academic achievement were seen as significant in this study, with pupils reporting that feeling under pressure to achieve certain grades made them feel stressed. However, some aspects of preparation for tests did not make them feel stressed such as practice tests. This information may help schools to provide pupils with supportive working environments when working towards tests. This could include establishing a supportive ethos whereby effort is recognised and there is less of a focus on achievement and attaining grades. Children also reported stress in relation be being compared to

their peers and whilst this may not have been done explicitly by class teachers, pupils reported that they did feel pressure in this area. More emphasis could be placed on learning transferable study skills and developing a sense of mastery than on achieving a specific grade in order for schools to be seen as successful. It may be helpful to schools and parents to know that children did not mind the preparation for tests if they were presented in a less pressurised way. As pupils reported finding specific study skills helpful, schools could focus on teaching pupils transferable study skills as well as practising for specific tests. Schools and parents could also be mindful of the subtle messages they are giving to pupils when discussing performance, giving feedback or setting pupils in certain ways.

4. Avoidance strategies, such as eating unhealthy food, was a coping strategy that some of the children in this sample used to make them feel better when stressed. As this is associated with poorer outcomes and more distressing thoughts, EPs could support children with finding better alternatives to make themselves feel better when stressed. This could include lessons teaching children relaxation techniques such as breathing exercises or mindfulness. Some children in this sample reported using such techniques to help them manage stress but these had been taught to them on an ad hoc basis by family or friends. Having a more systematic and planned programme may help a wider range of children to use such techniques when experiencing stress. Other ways to manage stress could be presented to the children such as taking part in an enjoyable activity, such as a sport, or spending

time with supportive people such as family or friends rather than being alone.

5. The use of nature to feel better when experiencing stress was a coping strategy used by some of the children in this sample. EPs could offer this as an option to help children manage stress, for example encouraging children to find a quiet space outside or to take a few minutes to appreciate their surroundings. Schools could be encouraged to provide quiet spaces, nature areas or even trips and activities that utilise this interest to enable children to experience some time outside and drawing upon the calmness of nature that children reported as being helpful.

6. Systems in school could be adapted so that children experience less stress in relation to tests and achievement in school. This could include less emphasis on achievement in school with more of a focus on gaining skills and mastery. At a school level, teachers could be mindful of how children respond to pressure to work within a time limit and help children to learn how to manage their time effectively and reduce the pressure in relation to working on timed tasks. Children also reported stress in relation to making mistakes, so practice and ethos could be amended to see how mistakes can be helpful for learning.

5.5 Summary

5.5.1 Strengths

This research represents an exploratory study into the views of children's perceptions of stress. This is important because children's self-reported perceptions of stress revealed insights in to the subjective nature of what children find stressful, providing educators and parents with an accurate and up to date account of the pressures children of this age are facing. Furthermore, there is very little up to date research on children's views on stress within the UK and so this research adds to a limited body of research in this area. Providing a clear account of children's experience of stress can also help parents and teachers to consider ways in which the stressful demands that children face can be mediated and support children with learning the best ways of coping with these stressors. This is particularly important as the evidence suggests that having effective and flexible coping tools can promote better outcomes for children in relation to their mental health and wellbeing.

A further strength is the development of a questionnaire that can be used to collect children's views on the stresses children face. This represents an up to date list of items that children have experienced that has been generated by children themselves, thus potentially capturing a more accurate picture of children's stressors. Whilst this questionnaire is still being developed, initial findings indicate that it has good internal validity and therefore provides a suitable measure of what children of this age group experience as stressful. Additionally, the sample size of those children who completed the questionnaire was large enough to be considered adequately powered.

This research contributes to provide a rich picture of the current stressors and coping that children experience by using a mixed methods design. This has enabled the data from the questionnaire to be expanded on and a more accurate account of how children experience and manage stress to be created. This has enabled the researcher to create a more subjective account of the experiences of children and stress. Examples of this, is a clearer understanding of the ways in which children use social media to distract themselves from the feeling associated with the stress they encounter and the gender differences between stress and coping between boys and girls.

As highlighted throughout the discussion this study has found that children are using a wide range of coping strategies. However, some of these may be regarded as less helpful, such as those related to eating or avoidance of the stressor, and further support may need to be provided to enable children to develop more effective ways of managing the stresses they encounter. Furthermore, there was some suggestion that the children in this sample used fewer problem solving approaches and as these have been associated with better long term outcomes then providing children and schools with further support to develop the use of these may be helpful.

5.5.2 Limitations

Sampling procedure

The first limitation of this study is the selection of the sample for the second phase of the study which employed a purposive sampling technique which meant that the children who volunteered for this phase of the study may not

be representative of those who completed the questionnaire during phase one. This is highlighted by the fact that the children who completed the interviews did not appear to be feeling particularly stressed especially in relation to some of the areas that were identified within the first phase of the research, for example stresses relating to the family.

The selection of the children for the first phase of the research was conducted within one part of the Local Authority in which the researcher was working as a trainee. Whilst the sample size was considered adequate for this current study, the selection of children from this specific region may not represent the views and experiences from other parts of the country, for example more urban locations. Furthermore, this current study did not ask for demographic information from the respondents which may further limit the potential for generalisability.

Measures

Another limitation of this study is that the questionnaire is still in its development phase and despite following the procedures outlined in questionnaire development, such as piloting and subsequently amending items, some difficulties with the questionnaire later emerged. One of these is the overlap between some of the strategies listed in the coping section which make it difficult to draw more accurate conclusions, for example the distinction between the different adults children may ask for help is somewhat vague as the categories are not mutually exclusive on the coping section relating to support from others. Furthermore, the distinction between those items relating to distraction and avoidance styles of coping are not

differentiated within the structure of the questionnaire. To further improve this, items relating to coping may need to be further defined and amended.

A further limitation in respect to the development of the measure is the development of the categories used to measure stress and coping. Whilst most of the sections demonstrated good internal consistency one of the sections, growing up stress, demonstrated a lower level. This may need further refinement of items in order to improve this if this measure is to be used more widely in EP practice.

5.5.3 Future research

This study came up with many interesting findings but due to the exploratory nature of this design, further areas could be developed in order to develop future research in this area.

One area that could be further developed could be more exploration relating to the coping styles that children use in relation to certain stressors. Previous research on children's stress and coping have suggested that some coping styles are more effective when dealing with specific stressors (Band & Weisz, 1988) and that children's coping could be supported by using certain coping strategies in specific situations. Currently, there is very little research which has examined if and how children employ different coping in relation to different stressors. The benefit of this, could be that children are then able to select the most appropriate coping strategy in relation to the demands of the situation thereby enabling more effective coping and better long term outcomes.

The second area could be in relation to the development of the questionnaire. In addition to the improvements outlined in the previous section, the items on the questionnaire could be more accurately grouped to indicate how the stressors are related to the categories they have been assigned to. This could be achieved through the using of Factor Analysis to determine more accurate factor loadings for each category, something which other measures on stress and coping have utilised (Byrne et al., 2011). This could contribute to a more accurate tool to measure stress and coping in this age group ensuring that the items are accurately clustered into distinct dimension that reflect the similarities between the items on the scale (Byrne, et al., 2011). This could enable further and more wide use of this tool to identify and support children with stress and coping that could be used by both schools and EPs.

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Appendix A

Parent information sheet (questionnaire)

Research project title: Investigating the stresses children experience and the coping strategies they use.

What is the research and why is it important?

- Experiencing stress has been shown to have an impact on the emotional, social and academic development of children. The ways in which children cope with stress can mediate the effects of stress and develop resilience in children.
- Therefore, it is important to understand what children are experiencing as stressful and how they cope with this stress, in order to develop better coping strategies and find ways to reduce the stresses children face.
- Whilst previous research has focused on asking adults about what they think children find stressful, very little research has asked children directly.
- Therefore, I would like to find out the views of children about the stresses they face in their daily lives and what they do to feel better.
- The findings of this study will help inform Educational Psychology practice and support schools with finding ways to help children cope with stress.

The researcher

I am Katie Sugg, a Year 2 Trainee Educational Psychologist, on the Doctorate in Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology at the Institute of Education, University College London. I believe in the importance of finding out the views of children in order to inform educational practice.

What will my child be asked to do?

Your child will asked to be fill in a questionnaire which will require them to circle an option (in the form of a smiley, sad or neutral face) that best describes their response to a range of stressful situations. There will also be a space on the questionnaire for your child to add their own thoughts and views about stress if they wish. This will take place during the school day within the school and will take approximately half an hour.

The process:

1. If you are happy for your child to take part, please show them the child information sheet.
2. If you would like your child to take part in this research, then please sign and return the enclosed consent form and return to the school office by [insert date].
3. The aims of the research and an explanation of the research will be given to your child by myself before your child completes the questionnaire.

4. The questionnaire will then be completed by your child, during the school day, at your child's school.
5. Once the research has been completed, a research briefing will be sent to you, alongside a poster explaining my findings to your child.

What will happen to the information provided by my child?

Each questionnaire will be anonymised with an individual number and every effort will be made to ensure that your child's responses remain confidential. The completed questionnaires will be kept securely and in a separate place to any personal details or contact information provided on the consent forms. These details will be stored securely and not shared with anyone.

What should I do now?

If you have any further questions please feel free to contact me by email me at ████████████████. If your child would like to take part please sign and return the consent forms. Please note, that your child can withdraw from the study at any time.

Supervision and ethical approval

The research is being supervised by Dr Amy Harrison, lecturer in Psychology and Dr Karen Majors, deputy Programme Director of the Doctorate in Child, Educational and Adolescent Psychology at the Institute of Education. The project has ethical approval from the department of Psychology and Human Development, which means the committee had considered the benefits and risks of this research.

Data protection information

The data controller for this project will be University College London(UCL). The UCL Data Protection Office provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data. If you are concerned about how your, or your child's, data is being processed please contact UCL's data protection officer, Lee Shailer, data-protection@ucl.ac.uk. If you remain unsatisfied you can also contact the Information Commissioner's Office. Details can be found at https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-the-generaldata-protection-regulation-gdpr.

Parent information sheet (interview)

Research project title: Investigating the stresses children experience and the coping strategies they use.

What is the research and why is it important?

- Experiencing stress has been shown to have an impact on the emotional, social and academic development of children. The ways in which children cope with stress can mediate the effects of stress and develop resilience in children.

- Therefore, it is important to understand what children are experiencing as stressful and how they cope with this stress, in order to develop better coping strategies and find ways to reduce the stresses children face.
- Whilst previous research has focused on asking adults about what they think children find stressful, very little research has asked children directly.
- Therefore, I would like to find out the views of children about the stresses they face in their daily lives and what they do to feel better.
- The findings of this study will help inform Educational Psychology practice and support schools with finding ways to help children cope with stress.

The researcher

I am Katie Sugg, a Year 2 Trainee Educational Psychologist, on the Doctorate in Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology at the Institute of Education, University College London. I believe in the importance of finding out the views of children in order to inform educational practice.

What will my child be asked to do?

Your child will asked to take part in an individual interview which will take place at your child's school, during the school day. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes. They will be asked about what type of things they find stressful, both inside and outside of school and the things they do to feel better when they are stressed. The interview will be semi-structured so that additional questions about how your child experiences stress may be asked and further questions asked to find out who helps them feel better if they are feeling stressed. Your child will be made aware that they can pass on answering a question at any time if they wish.

The process:

1. If you are happy for your child to take part, please show them the child information sheet.

2. If you would like your child to take part in this research, then please sign and return the enclosed consent form and return to the school office by [insert date].

3. The interview will then be carried out by myself with your child, during the school day, at your child's school.
4. Once the research has been completed, a research briefing will be sent to you, alongside a poster explaining my findings to your child.

What will happen to the information provided by my child?

Each questionnaire will be anonymised with an individual number and every effort will be made to ensure that your child's responses remain confidential. The completed questionnaires will be kept securely and in a separate place to any personal details or contact information provided on the consent forms. These details will be stored securely and not shared with anyone.

What should I do now?

If you have any further questions please feel free to contact me by email me at
████████████████. If your child would like to take part please sign and return
the consent forms. Please note, that your child can withdraw from the study at any
time.

Supervision and ethical approval

The research is being supervised by Dr Amy Harrison, lecturer in Psychology and Dr
Karen Majors, deputy Programme Director of the Doctorate in Child, Educational
and Adolescent Psychology at the Institute of Education. The project has ethical
approval from the department of Psychology and Human Development, which
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processed please contact UCL's data protection officer, Lee Shailer, data-
protection@ucl.ac.uk. If you remain unsatisfied you can also contact the
Information Commissioner's Office. Details can be found at https://ico.org.uk/for-
organisations/guide-to-the-generaldata-protection-regulation-gdpr.

Child information sheet (questionnaire)

Research project title: Investigating the stresses children experience and the coping
strategies they use.

Who am I?

I am Katie Sugg. I am training to be an Educational Psychologist. I often
work with children to find out what helps them in school.

What is stress?

Stress is something you feel when you are worried or uncomfortable about
something. This worry in your mind can your body feel bad. You may feel angry,
frustrated or scared. This can sometimes make you feel physically unwell - you may
get a stomachache or a headache. We can often feel stressed in connection to a
particular event or situation which can makes us feel as described above.

Why am I doing this research project?

We know that for some children experiencing feelings of stress can make them feel
unhappy and feel worried. We also know that some children have really good ways
of making themselves feel better if they are stressed but that some children would

like some more help in learning how to cope with this stress. This research wants to find out what children of your age are finding stressful and how you cope with this if you do feel stressed. This information will be used to help find ways to help other children find ways to manage stress. **I would like you to fill in a questionnaire that asks you about your experience s of feeling stressed.**

What will I be asked to do?

1. You will be asked to listen to a brief explanation of what stress is to make sure you clearly understand what the word **stress** means.

2. You will then answer the questions on the questionnaire. There are 50 questions, which you have to answer by circling one of five faces. This will be explained to you before you start the questionnaire.

3. There will also be some space on the questionnaire for you to write your own views if you wish to.

4. An adult (myself and a member of the school staff) will be there to help with reading the questions if you need any help.

5. This questionnaire will take about 20 minutes to complete.

6. After this, I will talk to the group about the different ways people can feel better if they feel stressed.

What will happen to the information?

- All the information from the questionnaires will be put onto a table and this will be anonymised, which means no-one will be able to tell who has said what.
- All the information will be carefully looked at to see what things children of your age find most stressful and you feel better.
- All of the information will be written up into a report. I will share this with others but people will not be able to tell what your responses were.
- I will give you a poster at the end of the research explaining the findings.
- What you write on the questionnaire is private and only I will know your responses. I will not share this with anyone except if something you write makes me think you are not safe and then I will have to tell someone.

What do I do know?

If you want to take part then there is a consent form for you to complete. Give this to your parent(s) to send back to me.

If you decide to take part, then I see you in school, with the other children who are taking part, to explain how to fill in the questionnaire.

You will then fill in the questionnaire. This will take about half an hour.

If you change your mind about taking part you can pull out at any time without giving me a reason.

If you have any questions then please email me at:

████████████████████

Thank you

Child information sheet (interview)

Research project title: Investigating the stresses children experience and the coping strategies they use.

Who am I?

I am Katie Sugg. I am training to be an Educational Psychologist. I often work with children to find out what helps them in school.

What is stress?

Stress is something you feel when you are worried or uncomfortable about something. This worry in your mind can your body feel bad. You may feel angry, frustrated or scared. This can sometimes make you feel physically unwell - you may get a stomachache or a headache. We can often feel stressed in connection to a particular event or situation which can makes us feel as described above.

Why am I doing this research project?

We know that for some children experiencing feelings of stress can make them feel unhappy and feel worried. We also know that some children have really good ways of making themselves feel better if they are stressed but that some children would like some more help in learning how to cope with this stress. This research wants to find out what children of your age are finding stressful and how you cope with this if you do feel stressed. This information will be used to help find ways to help other children find ways to manage stress. **I would like you to fill in a questionnaire that asks you about your experience s of feeling stressed.**

What will I be asked to do?

1. An **interview** which will take about 45 minutes.

2. I will ask you some questions about the things you might find stressful, inside and outside of school.

3. This will take place at your school, during the school, in one of the rooms at your school. It will be an individual interview which means that it will only be you being interviewed at that time.

4. I will record the interview using an audio recorder.

What will happen to the information?

- All the information from the questionnaires will be put onto a spreadsheet and this will be anonymised, which means no-one will be able to tell who has said what.
- All the information will be carefully looked at to see what things children of your age find most stressful and you feel better.
- All of the information will be written up into a report. I will share this with others but people will not be able to tell what your responses were.
- I will give you a poster at the end of the research explaining the findings.
- What you write on the questionnaire is private and only I will know your responses. I will not share this with anyone except if something you write makes me think you are in danger and then I will have to tell someone.

What do I do know?

If you want to take part then there is a consent form for you to complete. Give this to your parent(s) to send back to me.

If you decide to take part, then I see you in school, with the other children who are taking part, to explain how to fill in the questionnaire.

You will then fill in the questionnaire. This will take about half an hour.

If you change your mind about taking part you can pull out at any time without giving me a reason.

If you have any questions then please email me at:

████████████████████

Thank you

Parent consent form

Research project title: Investigating the stresses children experience and the coping strategies they use.

Name of researcher: Katie Sugg

Yes

☐ I have read and understood the information leaflet about the research.

☐ I have the opportunity to ask any questions about the project and my child's involvement in it.

☐ I understand that I can withdraw my child from the project at any time. If I choose to do this, any data they have contributed will not be used.

☐ I understand my child's role in the project.

☐ I understand that I am free to ask the researcher any questions relating to the project at any time.

☐ I understand that the questionnaire and/or interviews will only be conducted if my child agrees to participate and that they are free to withdraw from this project at any time without having to give a reason. Any data they have contributed will not be used.

☐ I understand that all information given by child is confidential and will not be discussed with others.

☐ I understand that if my child discloses anything which could cause them harm, then this information will have to be passed on to the appropriate adult or professional.

☐ I understand that if my child takes part in the interview this will be audio recorded.

☐ I understand that the information provided will be used with the research report and that the findings may be used in future reports or presentations.

☐ I understand that my child's name will not be used in the report and that every attempt will be made to protect their confidentiality.

Name:_____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B

Questionnaire on Stress

SATs and tests	This did not happen to me	It happened but it did not matter to me	It made me a bit upset	It made me quite upset	It made me very upset
Doing badly in a big test at school.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
Practising for tests at school.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
Not getting the level needed in a test at school.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
Teacher pressure to do well in a test.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
Parent pressure to do well in a test.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
How the classroom is laid out during a test.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
Not doing as well as others at school.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
Spending time working on tests at school.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
Worrying about getting things wrong in a test.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
Not finishing a test in time.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁

Is there anything else you find stressful about taking tests in school? If there is, then write it in the box below:

School work	This did not happen to me	It happened but it did not matter to me	It made me a bit upset	It made me quite upset	It made me very upset
Some of the schoolwork is too hard.	🙂	😐	🙁	😡	😢
Not finishing the work in time.	🙂	😐	🙁	😡	😢
Feeling the work is not good enough.	🙂	😐	🙁	😡	😢
Worrying about making mistakes.	🙂	😐	🙁	😡	😢
Getting a bad mark or comment for work.	🙂	😐	🙁	😡	😢
Getting things wrong in class.	🙂	😐	🙁	😡	😢
Friends getting a higher mark in work than you.	🙂	😐	🙁	😡	😢
Not being able to understand the homework.	🙂	😐	🙁	😡	😢
Teachers sometimes go too fast to understand.	🙂	😐	🙁	😡	😢
It is hard to concentrate at school.	🙂	😐	🙁	😡	😢
Having to learn things at school that is not interesting.	🙂	😐	🙁	😡	😢
Not getting homework handed in on time.	🙂	😐	🙁	😡	😢

Is there anything else you find stressful about your work at school? If there is, then write it in the box below:

Friendships and other children	This did not happen to me	It happened but it did not matter to me	It made me a bit upset	It made me quite upset	It made me very upset
Friends always want me to be just like them.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
People saying bad things about me.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
Not being liked by other children in the class.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
Friendships in the class changing.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
Having to work in groups with others.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
Classmates making fun of me.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
People saying things about me behind my back.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
The behaviour of other children in the class.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
Some other children at school make fun of me or pick on me.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
People saying unkind things on social media (WhatsApp, Facebook).	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
Not being allowed to use social media when my friends are.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁

Is there anything else you find stressful about your friends at school? If there is, then write it in the box below:

Growing up	This did not happen to me	It happened but it did not matter to me	It made me a bit upset	It made me quite upset	It made me very upset
Having to work hard to take entrance tests for secondary school.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
Having to perform in a school production or play.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
Working with younger children and having to look after them at school.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
Being worried about going on a school trip where you stay overnight.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
Being worried about going to secondary school.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
Worrying about not getting the secondary school of my choice.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
Having to run clubs or groups for younger pupils.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
Worrying about getting lost in strange places.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁

Is there anything else you find stressful about being in the top end of the school? If there is, then write it in the box below:

Family life	This did not happen to me	It happened but it did not matter to me	It made me a bit upset	It made me quite upset	It made me very upset
Worrying that something bad may happen to my family.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
Mum and Dad have split up or got divorced.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
Someone close got very ill or was badly hurt.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
Having an argument with a brother or sister.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
A pet has been ill.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
Having too many things to do at one time.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
Sometimes having to do things with people I don't know.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
Being in trouble with parents or the people who look after me.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
Parents, or the people who look after me, want me to take on too much responsibility for things.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁
Not being able to spend time with other people in my family.	🙂	😐	🙁	🙁	🙁

Is there anything else you find stressful about being in the top end of the school? If there is, then write it in the box below:

Coping:

Below is a list of things that children sometimes do, think and feel when they are feeling stressed about things.

For each item below circle put a tick in the box that shows how much you do or feel these things when you are feeling stressed.

Getting away from it all	Not at all	A little	sometimes	A lot
Listen to music with headphones in.				
Go to bedroom and lie on my bed.				
Go for a walk (alone or with a pet).				
Spend time alone.				
Stay in bed longer than usual.				
Wishing that the stress or problem would go away.				
Trying not to think about the stress, to forget about it all.				
Playing computer or video games.				

Distraction	Not at all	A little	Sometimes	A lot
Keep my mind off the stress by doing a sport.				
Keep my mind off the stress by doing activities I enjoy.				
Try to think about happy things.				
Do something to calm myself down (e.g. meditate, imagine a peaceful place).				
Do something to take my mind of the stress (such as play video games, watch TV or read a book).				
Taking deep breaths.				

Support from others	Not at all	A little	Sometimes	A lot
Talk to someone in my family about how I am feeling.				
Talk to a friend about how I am feeling.				
Spend time with my friends.				
Talk to another adult.				
Spend time with a pet.				
Talk to a toy or teddy.				
Chat to friends on phone or message on phone.				
Talk to an adult at school who may help me.				

Are there any other things you do to feel better when you are feeling stressed?

Write them in the box below:

Thank you so much for taking part in this project.

Your responses are really appreciated.

Appendix C

Interview schedule for follow up interviews

(based on Robson's semi-structured interviews)

Introduction - verbatim script:

Hello, I'm Katie, a trainee Educational Psychologist. Do you remember that I came in to your school in July to carry out a survey on stress in pupils in years 5 and 6?

I am now carrying out some interviews with some of the children who completed the questionnaire and you have been selected. This will involve me asking you some further questions about your experiences. This will take 30 minutes and your responses will be audio recorded Are you happy for this to go ahead?

Definition of stress:

- *Stress is something you feel when you feel pressured or uncomfortable about something, often related to things that are going on in your environment or around you.*

- *This feeling in our mind can your body feel bad. You may feel angry, frustrated or scared. This can sometimes make you feel physically unwell - you may get a stomachache or a headache.*

- *We can often feel stressed in connection to a particular event or situation which can makes us feel as described above.*

- *People experience stress in different ways – often it is how we see a situation that makes us feel stressed or how we feel able to cope with this stress.*

Topic headings:

Test stress

Can you tell me how you find taking tests at school?

School stress

How do you find your work at school?

Is there anything that you find difficult or that makes you feel stressed?

Friendship stress

Can you tell me about how you find friendships at school?

Do you get on with the other children in your class?

How do you find the behaviour of other children?

Growing up stress

As you are getting older is there anything that you find harder to manage?

Family stress

At home, is there anything you feel places you under stress?

Coping

For the coping questions, have prompt (from the questionnaire as to some of the coping strategies they use/do not use).

Which of these do you do when you feel stressed?

Can you tell me a bit more about why you use this strategies to help you to cope?

Which ones do you find helpful? Why do you think this is?

Are there any other things that you do to feel better when you are feeling stressed?

Appendix D

Table illustrating exploratory data analysis (EDA) conducted on the main

stress variables.

Main stress variable	Mean	Median	SD	Interquartile range	Skewness	Kurtosis
SATs and tests	.96	.80	.59	.80	1.27	1.72
School work	1.2	1.08	.69	.83	1.08	1.18
Friendships	1.18	1.00	.80	1.27	.81	-.01
Growing up	.84	.75	.51	.63	1.0	.72
Family Life	1.38	1.2	.82	1.05	.84	.23
Total stress	1.11	.99	.56	.66	.85	.31

Appendix E Coded interview transcript

Transcription 4 and initial codes

Year 5 Female School 8

Interview   **Codes**

Introduction - verbatim script:

KS: Hello, I'm Katie, a trainee
Educational Psychologist. Do you
remember that I   came in to your
school in July to carry out a survey
on stress in pupils in years   5
and 6?

         I am now carrying out some
interviews with some of the children
who   completed the questionnaire
and you have been selected. This will
involve me   asking you some further
questions about your experiences.
This will take 30   minutes and your
responses will be audio recorded.
Are you happy for this to   go
ahead?

KS: When I came in to do the
questionnaire, can you remember
what I was trying   to find out?
D: Was it trying to find out what
things make us feel stressed? And
how much?

KS: Yes, absolutely. It is trying to
find out what children of your age find

stressful.   Can you remember what stress means or can you tell me what stress means?

D: Stress means panicking in a way that you think when there is something that   you haven't done.

KS: Can be yes, that's one part of stress. Can you think of anything else that might   explain stress?

D: If you've got, if you have had an argument with somebody and you don't know   how to deal with it.

KS:

Definition of stress:

- Stress is something you feel when you feel pressured or uncomfortable about something, often related to things that are going on in your environment or around you.

- This feeling in our mind can your body feel bad. You may feel angry, frustrated or scared. This can sometimes make you feel physically unwell - you may get a stomachache or a headache.

- We can often feel stressed in connection to a particular event or situation which can makes us feel as described above.

- People experience stress in different ways – often it is how we see a situation that makes us feel stressed or how we

Stress as feeling panicky

Stress when there is something you have not done

Stress as having an argument with someone

Stress not having the resources to deal with a problem

feel able to cope with this stress.

KS: So if you remember the questionnaire consisted of 6 sections: SATs and   tests, school work, friendships, growing up, family and coping - how you   manage when you are feeling stressed. These questions will relate to the different sections of the questionnaire.

Test stress

KS: Thinking back to when you were in year 5, can you tell me how you find taking   tests at school? Or did you have any tests?

D: Er, well taking tests, when I take tests I am sort of alright with it because I   know that er the only reason that I am doing the tests is so that the teacher   knows what is going to help me. So I don't really worry about it too much
        particularly.

KS: So when you think back to doing the tests in year 5, you weren't too worried,   so how many tests would you take and do you know what kind of tests that   you took?

D: Errrm well they were every year at my old school, and a little bit at my new   school. I am not sure. But we have a week and we get these big, fat booklets   of, I think there were three different tests for maths, and three different test for
        English, and you have to answer all the different things that you have learnt in   the year. And

also sometimes we have half term tests which were just which were pieces of paper with spelling tests on and just a quick maths things like fractions which we have learnt this term.

KS: And they were things you had done recently in class?

D: Yes.

KS: So when you were sat taking those tests, how would you be feeling? What would be going through your mind?

D: Well obviously I was thinking a lot about how to answer them and what I've learnt. I was also thinking about the way the I would the way I would work it out. and which way would be better, [pause]

KS: And how would you make that choice?

D: I would think about which one I found easiest even if it's the longest way

KS: So you had a strategy when you were taking your tests? And when you took these tests at school, these half termly tests you were taking, did they ever change the room, the layout of the room?

D: Erm they don't normally change the room apart from sometimes they er like take some people out so that there are less people in the classroom. So it's a bit quieter.

KS: And was that ok for you?

Taking tests is fine (year 5)

purpose of test - to help you learn

Teachers as a source of help

Rationale of taking tests

Taking tests infrequently (yearly)

Taking tests- different subjects

Structure of tests - booklets

Quick tests on areas they've been learning in class

D: Yes.

KS: That didn't make you feel any different to how you would normally feel? Can   you think about anything about taking tests in school, either positive or   negative. How is you general view on taking tests at school?

D: I actually quite enjoy taking tests because I like having a set of questions and   knowing what question I am having and knowing what to do next. Because I   will have already learnt what in the tests. And I like to know what I am doing   before I do it.

Reflecting on learning

How to answer a question well

Strategies for answering a question

KS: And do you get results for your tests? Do you get a grade or a level?
D: No we don't.

KS: And would you want to know that or are you ok with how it is?
D: I would quite like to know but I'm ok if people if they feel teachers aren't sharing the tests results because well that's their choice. Because well they   don't want to (laughs).

Different methods for answering questions

KS: So when you take your tests you are not trying to achieve a certain level you   are just trying to do your best?
D: Yes.

KS: Do you do much practice for these tests or are they like here you are, you are doing them now?
D: Erm., we don't normally do practice for those but since I've got into year 6,   erm sometimes, well today we were going through our

Room layout does not change during exams (year 5)

Some people do not take the tests

maths homework and   we were ordering numbers and people were putting the smallest not the   biggest and my teacher was saying "If you did this sort of thing in a SATs   test then there would be points taken off". So I guess as I get into year 6   there's sort of more explaining sort of preparing for SATs.

KS: So that's quite a big difference that you are noticing, so that last year when you did the tests you were just doing the tests but already you've begun to   notice that in year 6 it is a bit different. Is that ok?

Quieter test environment

D: Yeah, that's alright with me because then I can remember that so that I don't   make the same mistake.

Enjoy taking tests

Liking the format and structure of taking tests

KS: That sounds a very sensible approach. Is there anything else you want to tell   me about taking tests at school?

Knowing what is coming next when taking a test

Competence in being able to answer the questions

D: Ermmmmm.. not really.

KS: The next section, or the next set of questions that I would like to ask you, area   about school work generally. How do you find your work at school?

No grade or knowledge of test score (Y5)

School stress

D: Erm well it depends which subject I'm doing. When I am doing English, I like   to write stories and poems and things in assemblies and today I read out my   poem in assembly ..

Wanting to know score on tests

KS: What was it about?

D: It was about changing seasons, erm and because when I am doing English I can make up my own bits and it doesn't have to be a set answer like in maths   but sometimes in English, for example if you are writing stories, I plan too   much and then I don't have enough time to write it up. In maths, I don't   particularly like maths, but I say I am quite good at it and I try and do the   questions at my best ability. And see how it turns out.

No practise for tests (Y5)

KS: What is it that you don't like about maths, as you say you are really good at it,   so what is it that you don't like?

Increased focus on test and practise in year 6

D: I think I just sometimes can't get my head round the fact that there are so   many numbers. (laughs)

Teacher pressure to do well

Increased preparation for tests in year 6

KS: In the world?

Increased pressure to do well

D: In maths generally.

Teacher reminds students of exam marking

KS: There's lots of numbers, so what is that confusing?

D: sometimes it's confusing because I can't work out what value each of the   numbers represents. And also sometimes the symbols and that like the line   between a fraction and division and stuff like that. I don't really understand.

KS: When you don't understand something, like you don't know what a symbol   means, how does that make you feel?

D: When I struggle to work out what it means, I try and think really hard back to all the things that I've

Extra practise and pressure can be

learnt and see if I can remember what it is. Sometimes it makes me feel a bit cross that I can't remember and then I ask the teacher.

helpful

KS: So, you feel cross with yourself that you can't remember it? Well we all put ourselves under pressure sometimes don't we, so it is not about other people but we can put ourselves under pressure. Do you think you put yourself under pressure to do well?

D: Nods yes.

KS: Summarises key points - Is there anything else that you find hard in your work?

D: Sometimes I find it hard working with other children. [pause]

subject preferences

KS: Can you tell me more about that?

like English and writing stories

D: Well I don't.. well I prefer working independently and not with other children because I like to do everything my own way and know the way that I am doing it before whereas sometimes when I work with other children they we just sort of have to put all of our ideas together and make something. And sometimes that's good but sometimes I find it a little bit hard to get to "collaborate". (both laugh)

Enjoy sharing work with others

Liking reading work out

Enjoying being creative in English

KS: So you find the collaboration difficult? Is that because sometimes you have to chnage what you want to do?

D: Sometimes. Sometimes it's because I don't because I'm not

particularly very good because I don't get along very well with the person I have to work with. So yes.

Not liking certain subjects

Sense of competence

Not having the ability in some subjects

KS: And how often you have to work with groups in that way?

D: Err since I've got in to my new school, I haven't done it very often part from when we have talk partners the we have we sit next to someone new and er my talk partner is er not the most person I would like to sit next to. But I get used to it.

doing your best

Importance of doing well

Making sense of a subject - too many numbers

KS: Sometimes you do have to learn to get used to it. Is your new school this year or was it last year?
D: It was Easter last year.

KS: So you did some of year 5 in your old school and some of it in your new school? So you find collaboration a bit tricky sometimes. So what do you do if you are struggling with that?

Struggling with key concepts - maths

D: I would try and think about when I got over with. Try and think about all the good things I can do afterwards, for example when I get home I can do whatever I like. and I try and think about those things to look forward to and then I get on with the collaborative work and get on with other children.

Maths is hard

Not understanding maths

KS: So you've got something to look forward to and then you just have to get on with it.?

D: Yes.

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KS: Have you ever spoken to your teachers or anyone at school about this?

D: Yeah I have spoken to my teachers before at my old school about working with other children.

KS: Did they have any helpful suggestions?

D: They did but I didn't really use them all the time because I just thought of what I've got ahead. I thought if I do this, then I can get on with that.

KS: It bothers you but you have got a strategy that helps. It sounds like you have put a lot of thinking in to this. This moves on to the next thing which is what you do to feel better but before we move on do you put yourself under any pressure at school. I know we mentioned it before but is there anything else you'd like to say about putting yourself under pressure to do well?

D: I wouldn't say I do at school but sometimes at home if there's something I've been wanting to do for a long time and I haven't managed to do it I sometimes feel stressed with myself for not managing to do it before.

KS: So what would that be?

D: It would be things like writing a letter to my old friends in London or sometimes it can be tidying up ...

KS: So tidying up,

trying to work it out

Struggle to get the answer

Persevere

Thinking back on learning

Frustration with self for being stuck

Teachers as support

Putting self under pressure

Difficulties with working with other children

Preferring working independently

Liking to do things own way

Not wanting to compromise

Difficulties with collaboration

D: Sometimes it can be finishing my homework or a particular thing that I have   been making like a thing that I wanted to finish.

KS: So you put yourself under pressure to compete it. What do you do when you can't manage to complete it time how do you manage this?

D: I tell mummy and she tells me not to worry about it and to leave it until the   next day until you have time. And it doesn't matter when you get it done.

KS: So she helps you by giving you a different way of thinking about it. Is there   anything else you want to say about how you find your school work generally?
        Homework?

D: I don't think so. I quite enjoy doing long homework projects where we have   several weeks to complete it because then I have got a long time to do   research and produce something good.

KS: So what kind of thing would that be, have you done one recently?

D: Yeah we did do one recently which was about the football world cup [face]and   at my old school we started when I got in to year 5 we started doing projects   where we created a presentation like a poster or a leaflet or we could do it on   the computer about a certain subject and I enjoyed doing that.

KS: So you like doing ongoing projects where you have got the time to think   about it and put a lot of effort in. How do you find, do you

Can be ok working with others

Difficulties getting on with other children

Having to talk to others

Difficulties with communicating with others

Peer differences

Being different from peers

Change of schools

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have weekly homework that you have to hand in?

D: Yeah we do we have maths, which is just one sheet of stuff normally quiet   easy for me. We have English and we have spelling.

KS: And are they alright?

Having to get things over with

Focusing on good things after

D: I do manage them quite well because we normally we do we do the thing we do our homework on we normally do it as a subject throughout the week so I   have time to practise it and think about it and work out what to do.

Looking forward to nice things when finding things hard

KS: So you have had all week to learn it so it is not anything new. Do you think   you get enough time to do your homework?

struggles with trying to get on with other children

D: I think we do get enough time to do our homework apart from when I have   got lots of things going on over the weekend. In which case I er sometimes I   do it after school or when I get in from school so I know it gets done.

Sharing concerns with teachers

KS: So you have other commitments you have to find a way of fitting that in. Next   section is about friendships and

Friendships

Teachers sharing strategies

other children. So I know you have been at your new school for a while now   so you might want to think about the last few months. How you find   friendships at school?

Strategies not helpful

D: Well when I joined my new

school I was thinking about making friends   because I don't particularly like going to and talking to people I don't know.   And I am not very good at making friends and erm [pause] starting   conversations. But I was lucky because lots of people wanted to be my friend.

KS: Ok so everybody came up to you and started playing. So how are your   friendships now?

D: Now in my class I realised in the end of year 5, that since the beginning of coming to my new school and the beginning of the summer holidays what I   thought of people had changed a lot and I have now got more individual   friendships instead of sort of going from group of people to the next and to   another then another and then back to this one again. I am normally sticking   to one or two people.

Putting self under pressure to do things (home)

Frustration with self for not completing more

KS: And are they your good friends now?

D: Yes.

KS: So when you started everyone wanted to be your friend and you had to work   out who would become your friend. So how are your friendships?

Tasks to do at home

D: I had a bit of going in and out with friends and finding the right people but now   I feel that my friends at my new school have a lot in common with me but are   also very different from me and I like it that way.

Homework pressure

Pressure on self to achieve things

KS: That sounds nice. What kind of things do you do with your friends, what do   you have in common?
D: In the playground we like talking together, about things that we like to do and   things that we have done at the weekend and in the holidays and sometimes   we play games with the littler people with the little children which is fun.

KS: How do you find the other children in your school who aren't your friends?
D: To begin with when I first joined there were a couple of people in my class   who I were a bit scared of but now that I am a bit further in to school I am not   as scared of them and I feel more comfortable now that I am in the older   years and because I know that then that there are not other people who are
        older than me who I am going to be scared of.

KS: So people you were scared of you are no longer scared of because you are   older than them?
D: No. Because I know them better.

KS: You know them better. So when you are with other children, say you are   playing a game in the playground with other children who are not your friends,   how would that be?

D: I wouldn't really I am not sure if I would enjoy it as much because they are not   people who I am very good friends with and I don't know the way that they   play. And the way that they make things up and the

Mum as a source of support

Parental advice

Change how you view problem

Enjoying homework

Liking projects

Having sufficient time to complete work

Following up on things of interest

World cup project

Learning that relates to real world events

Presenting work differently

way that they play or be   with their friends. So I feel a bit like I don't know what I am doing I try and get   on with it...

KS: Ok, thank you. One thing that came up on the questionnaire which came up a   lot and some people experienced it and others did not was going on phones   and the Internet and some people are allowed to and some people not. So do   you have a phone?
D: No.

KS: How do you find not having a phone when others do?
D: I am actually alright with it because I like drawing and making things and   reading books. And I don't tend to watch TV too much. I tend to do other   things like playing with my sister and reading books. And that sort of thing.

Maths homework easy

English and spelling homework

KS: So it doesn't bother you that you are not on those sort of things? Do you ever hear other children talk about that sort of thing?
D: I do but I just think that's what you think, that's what you know, I don't need to   worry about it.

Manage homework well

Homework relates to learning

Have the skills to do homework

KS: And when you are playing with your friends, what type of things do you like to   play?
D: I have had I have been round to a couple of their houses so far and but most   of them I only really play with in school and because my sister and lots of her   friends are in a playground that we are allowed to go in and we go and play   things like pretending to travel to different countries and I play that

with my   friends and my sister's friends.

KS: Any countries in particular?

D: Well normally we swim across the playground to India and then we go to back   to Australia and then we get on the aeroplane to Africa and then we go   somewhere else random (laughs)

KS: So you go so you are quite busy travelling to all these places, so do you see   many things in all these countries?

D: We normally spend about 3 minutes in each of these places so

KS: A whistle-stop tour (laughter)

D: In Australia I think we rode kangaroos and when we were in India I think we   just went to this random places and with a swimming pool and when we went   to I think when we went to India a different time we sat in the aeroplane and had a fancy dinner whilst the children played with the dog.

KS: Sounds good.

Growing up

        Thinking about as you are getting older sometimes people find that they get more responsibility as they grow up, they have to do new things that they are not used to. Have you had any experiences that you feel maybe present you   with a bit of a challenge as you get a bit older?

D: Erm I do like doing jobs around the house, and I like helping

Enough time to do homework

Other demands in competition to do homework

Managing time & prioritising

Worrying about making friends

Concerns over talking to new people

Starting a new school

Lacking confidence in ability to make friends

Difficulty starting conversations

Making friendships

other people.   Sometimes well a couple of things that I find hard but my sister is sometimes   happy to help and we work together on it. And I don't really find responsibility
         hard so well yeah.

KS: Do you get extra responsibility in school now you are at the top o the school?
D: I think we are starting to for example we have our own pencil pots that we   have to put away at the back of the classroom each time we go out to   breaktime and lunchtime and when we get out of school but I find that ok   because when I look on everybody else's desks their pencil pots are at the
         back of the classroom so I remember that I need to put mine away and we get   things like taking things down to other classes so and doing the registers and   telling different teachers messages and helping them with jobs. And I'm ok
         with that because I quite enjoy jobs.

KS: You like helping out and having that responsibility. It doesn't make you   overwhelmed. Just going back to ... [checking tape recorder] thinking ahead   as you are getting older to going to secondary school in a year. Do you think
         about those future events or...
D: I do think about those things sometimes but then I think I want to focus on   what's happening now and then worry about that when I get to it.

Forming new friendships

Learning about new people

Making secure friendships within group

Developing close friends

Establishing the right friendships

Shifting friendships

Friends who are similar

Friends who are different

Awareness of own self

KS: It's still a long way off and some of it you won't get to for a long time so you are just focusing on the here and now and not worrying about the future. That sounds like a good way of looking at things. Anything at home, or doing things at home, or outside of school, that might make you feel stressed like hobbies or..

Talking with friends in playground

Sharing news with friends

Playing games with younger ones

D: Well sometimes well on a weekly basis I go to I have started some different clubs and at first I was a bit nervous because I didn't know anybody there apart from my sister and I also got a bit nervous because there were people who were older than me but I found that this week that they were nice and I didn't need to be scared of them.

Enjoying playing with younger ones

Being scared of other children

KS: So sometimes it is the unknown but once you have got to know them then it's ok? Do you enjoy doing these out of school activities?
D: Yes.

Secure in being the eldest

Feels safer being the oldest in school

Wary of older children

KS: So once you have got over the nerves about meeting unknown people you are ok. So when you are feeling nervous what do you do to feel better?

D: In the first club that I tried out C [sister] and her friends were at it so I wasn't too nervous about that but obviously because they are all younger than me I didn't feel like as comfortable but then when I went to a different club there were not as many people who were older than me and a lot of younger ones and there

Getting to know others better

Knowing others lessens fear

were some really nice teachers there as well so I decided that I wanted to do that one.

KS: So at home, is there anything that makes you feel stressed? How are things in your home?

D: Sometimes waking up in the morning and getting all of my things done does make me feel stressed but mummy just tells me to focus on the next thing that I need to be doing and do that and then worry about the next thing.

KS: Having someone to give you hints can be really helpful, say mummy or someone, to help you to think about things in a different way. Now we are going to move on now to what people might do to help when they are feeling a little bit stressed or overwhelmed. List of coping strategies that children use - from the questionnaire.

Read through these and tell me which ones you use.

D reads.

D: Sometimes I try not to think about thing and put me off thinking about it. And that makes me feel in a different way. And sometimes if I just had an argument with my sister and I feel that it is unfair then I talk to one of my teddies. I think that probably the things that I do I sometimes think of do both of these two at the same time (points to them)

- to try and think about happy things

Unfamiliar other children

Does not like playing with unfamiliar children

Different interests from some others

Different ways of playing

Feeling insecure socially

Not having a phone

Enjoying reading and drawing

Liking making things up

KS: So what happy things might you think about?

D: Sometimes I think about something we have done for my birthday or for Christmas or and days out that we have had and all of the fun things that we saw and what we did. And that normally makes me feel a lot better about things.

- Do something to calm yourself down.

KS: What would you do to calm yourself down?
D: I would linked to a toy, I would speak it all out in different section with each bit of what happened and then think about what I can do to fix it.

KS: Would you do that on your own?
D: I do it on my own.

KS: Recap. How would you think of something to make it better?
D: I'd think of what I would do if I was stuck in a situation like that and what the best thing to do would be. And if I wasn't in a bad mood what the thing that I would do would be. For example saying sorry or trying to make up or giving little notes which say sorry which I sometimes do which helps to cos ... I am not the most confident person at saying sorry [laughs] so I find it that helps.

KS: So if you don't feel confident in saying that aloud you think of a practical way to solve this problem and sort it out. That sounds

Able to escape the every day

Playing with sibling

Family as a source of support

Other children on phones/social media

Difference between those who are and not on social media

Not being worried about these differences

Seeing others out of school

Not seeing others out of school

Social acceptance

Sibling support

Playing with younger children

Liking imaginative games

Imagination and escape

like an amazing thing I think   I
need to try some of your strategies.

Imagination and escape

KS: Are there any things that
aren't on here that you might do to
feel better?
D: Not that I can think of.
Sometimes I go into the garden and
er watch the world   go by basically.
And watch all of the trees.

Imagination and escape

KS: A nice calm environment to
calm you. Would you ever talk to an
adult?
D: In school I would normally talk
to a friend instead of an adult
because   sometimes I find that
the adults don't help.

KS: Would friends help?

Imagination and escape

D: Yes,

KS: What kind of help would they
give?
D: Well sometimes my friends
advise me on the best way to sort out
the situation and sometimes they
come with me to tell the teacher.
Because I am not very   confident
with telling teachers if I am feeling
upset so it always helps if I have a
friend to go with me.

KS: Someone to give you that bit
of support? Ok that is really really
helpful. Out of   the things that
you have told me are there any ones
that you use to feel better   more
regularly? Or is more helpful?
D: I think that I more regularly
talk to a toy or teddy than most of the
others.

Liking helping at home

KS: Is that because they are more

readily there for you?

working together with sibling

D: ods yes.

family as a safe place

KS: Why do you think that helps you?

Enjoying extra responsibility

D: I think it helps because the toy is sort of like because it is your own you think it   always agrees with you and most toys always look happy [laughs].

KS: Facial expressions can encourage you to talk to people. That is an insightful thing to say. Have you got anything else you would like to say before we

        finish? You have been really helpful. What will happen next. Thank you.   Questions.

Having extra responsibility at school

In charge of own equipment and resources

Others not taking responsibility

Liking helping others at school

enjoying jobs

Trying not to worry about future
events

Focusing on the here and now

nervous about starting new clubs

Not knowing other people

Nervous of older children

People are nice when you know them

Being worried about the unknown

The unknown is usually fine

Enjoying out of school activities

Not feeling comfortable in a group

Not wanting to be with older children

Not feeling comfortable with peers

Hard getting up in the morning

Pressure of getting everything done

Parent advice on how to manage stress

Breaking things down in to smaller parts

Trying not to think of the problem

Put off thinking about bad things

Talking to teddies

Thinking about happy thoughts

Thinking of past happy memories

Calming activities - talk to a toy

Expressing emotions

Thinking about the problem in different sections

Problem solving - how to fix the problem

Awareness of emotional response to problem

How to make things better

Not feeling confident to say sorry

Nature -being outside is calming

Talking to a friend at school

Adults at school not helpful

Friends advise- help with problem solving

worry about talking to teachers

Friends to support

Talking to a toy or teddy

Teddies always there

Teddies always agree

Appendix F

Table of themes, sub-themes and extracts for questionnaire data

Themes	sub themes	Quotes
1. Pressure to do well in SATS and tests	Time pressure	*I find it stressful when there is a timer on for tests because I feel like I have to finish in a time. I also find it stressful when my teacher reminds me of how high the expectations are because I feel like I'm not at the level I need to be.*
		Everybody else finishing and you're still going
	High expectations	*After I had finished my SATs my parents were really proud of my scores because they were really good. It made me a bit worried because if I don't do well in my next test my parents might not be happy with me.*
	Making mistakes	*I find it really stressful when we have a test and we have an hour and I finish in the first 20 minutes and then I am scared I have done something wrong.*

2. Pressure of school work	Making mistakes	*When I make stupid mistakes and I know I am doing it wrong but I can't fix it*
	School work being prioritised	*When I go to my keyboard lesson and miss half an hour, some of the teachers tell me off for not doing enough work.*
		When it [school work] stretches into break, lunch or free time
	Homework	*I feel stressed when I can't do my homework and my brother brags about how it is so easy.*
		Sometimes I get homework I don't know or my parents don't know and it takes me the whole evening to work it out.
3. Friendships difficulties	Falling out with friends	*I find it stressful when my friends ignore me and fall out with me without telling me why.*
		If two of them have an argument and I'm in the middle of it.

	Not fitting in	*At school, friendships feel so forced and complicated. I used to have a friend who I always tried to impress but I would never get to talk to them about the things that actually mattered to me*
		There is currently a craze for a game called Fornite. I don't know much and get called sad and a loner, don't want to put any names though.
	Others being mean	*Lots of people in my class say that I am dumb and weird but one person said that I should be in a mental hospital and I cried for three days.*
4. Comparison to others		*When they pressurise me in class.*
		Being the only one not to understand analogue.
		My friends usually boast about their work.

When you get easier work than everybody else.

When the person next to you has got a better score or when they are on to the next piece of work and I'm not.

I feel stressed and like there is a lot of pressure on me because she [sister]always gets excellent results and my parents expect the same thing from me.

Friends getting a better mark than me.

My friends are in the high group and I am in the low one

5. Family Pressure

My mum has gallstones and she's about to have an operation to take them out. When I'm bad, I get told off more than normal, so that stresses me out.

I got quite stressed when my mum and dad broke up

Someone (my grandad) died and it made me very upset

		Being treated differently from my brother.
Physical comfort	Food and drink	*Eating and drinking*
		Sometimes I find some food that I like.
		I eat things which are sweet.
		Have a bit of junk food e.g. a biscuit, a slice of cake.
		I like to eat when I feel stressed.
		Eat some crisps and watch YouTube.
		Go to my room and eat the snacks I like.
		Drink water
		Have Nando's with my friends.
		Eat chocolate and ice cream.
		I eat chocolate.
	Sleep	*I have a nap*
		Go to bed earlier than usual.

try to forget about anything by going to sleep

Take a nap to take it off my mind.

Support	Friendship support	*Maybe going to the park and meeting up with all of my friends to take my mind off problems that I might of had at school or at home.*
		I phone call a friend to know how they are doing and seeing if they can help me with my problems
		Have Nando's with my friends.
		When I have a dance comp I get stressed, my family and friends always encourage me and I take deep breaths.
		Taking things apart with my friends because it takes my mind off things.
	Family support	*I play cards with my grandad.*
		Having family time. Spending time with my baby sister as she cheers me up a lot
		Facetime my nan.
		I play with my brother.

When I have a dance comp I get stressed, my family and friends always encourage me and I take deep breaths.

I sometimes play with my brother.

Stay with my family and try to do nice things to get it off my mind.

I hug my parents and cry

Talk to your parents

Hug parents.

Avoidance and escape	Being alone	*Sometimes I just go to a quiet place.*

Go to a quiet place and just sit there

or staying in a compact space for a while.

just relax without anybody disturbing me

I try to forget it sometimes or talk to myself about what I could do, be by myself

Ignore people.

Sit on my swivel chairs in my conservatory.

Shut myself in a dark room and listen to music

Go to my room.

Go to a pecific [specific?] place in my house

Hide so no one can find me

Ignore people. Be quiet.

Blocking it
out

I try to forget it sometimes or talk to myself about what I could do

Sometimes I imagine that I'm flying and that I'm cool and invisible.

I wrap myself in my special blanket and imagine myself away to my safe place.

Watch my favourite movies.

I read a book and try to forget about anything

Think of good times.

I imagine my toys come to life

Purposeful attempts to relax	Relaxation strategies	*I enjoy reading my favourite book on my beanbag and listening to music to relieve stress.*
		I like to have a bath and relax
		I enjoy having baths, it makes me feel relaxed.
		Relaxing, doing nothing. Lazy holidays.
		Look at the sky and ceiling.
		Clench or unclench my fists.
		Grind my teeth together.
		My breathing exercises.
		Count to 10.
		Pace
		Counting to 10 in my head to calm down.
		Count to 100.

Nature and being outside	*I like to go to the garden.*
	I like to go outside and get some fresh air.
	Climb a tree.
	I go outside to the swing that's over the pond and read a book.
	Climb up a tree and read somewhere far from the stress.
	Sometimes I sit by my bedroom window, watching the birds - I love birds.
	Lie down outside.
	Sit outside on my driveway to get some fresh air.

Play outside for fresh air in my mind.

walk around the garden

open the windows.

Sit outside on the grass.

Lie down outside.

Distraction	Use of technology	*I watch YouTube to take my mind off everything*
		Play on my phone. Watch YouTube. Block everybody out
		I watch funny videos on YouTube or funny films. Sometimes I listen to music while playing on the Play Station.
		Playing Minecraft on the Play Station helps me when I am stressed.

Sometimes I go on my phone,

I watch YouTube. I listen to music whilst playing on the PS4 (Play Station 4).

I watch funny videos on YouTube or funny films. Sometimes I listen to music while playing on the Play Station. I also watch my favourite TV show.

When I am stressed I watch YouTube videos that make me laugh because they help me to forget what I am stressing about

Video games.

Physical activity	*Do parkour.*
	Going outside and playing on the trampoline calms me down.
	I go into the garden and go on my trampoline if I am feeling stressed because it blows my cobwebs away and makes me feel better.
	Also I like to do sport when I am worried.

do gymnastics

Jumping on my trampoline.

Go out in the garden for a few minutes and maybe kick a ball around.

Going outside and playing on the trampoline calms me down.

I go into the garden and go on my trampoline if I am feeling stressed because it blows my cobwebs away and makes me feel better

I play basket ball mostly

Swimming/laying or floating.

Go and ride my bicycle.

I spend a lot of time at my dance school to escape.

Enjoyable   *I enjoy reading my favourite book on my beanbag and listening to music to relieve stress.*

		activities
		Do art.
		Also I like to colour and draw.
		I do some colouring or some home learning to focus and engage my mind.
		I sometimes do arts and crafts e.g. drawing, colouring and painting.
		Draw.
		I read a book
		do things that make me happy or listen to music which I enjoy
		I sometimes sing songs to make me feel better
		Make something or do arts and crafts.
Active coping	Problem solving	*I splash cold water on my face and then sit on my bed and try to sort the problem out in my head.*
		I stretch out the problem and talk/whisper it to myself. It makes me calm.

Self-talk   *I talk to myself*

talk to myself about what I could do

Appendix G

Table of themes, codes and extracts for interview data

Themes	sub themes	Quotes
1. Pressure to do well in SATs/tests	Having to achieve a certain level	*I was worried that I was going to fail and that my parents would er not like me (transcript 5)*
		Erm well the teachers obviously wanted us to do well so I did find a little bit of pressure because they gave load of tests and they were like you should do well we know you can do it (transcript 5)
		Erm I usually get pressured because of like I know there is a time limit (transcript 7)
		Sometimes I might like think in my head that I might get embarrassed cos the others might get higher scores than me. (transcript 9)

	Worried about failing	*Well I was worried I wasn't going to get the questions right* (transcript 1).
		Erm I find it like I find it like I get quite nervous because I am afraid like if I fail like I am like scared about what is going to happen (transcript 7)
2. Importance of doing well in school	Taking school work seriously	*They said you're going to be fine, we helped each other study and we really wanted each other to do well (transcript 5)*
	Importance of doing your best	*Yeahh, I was just expected to do my best (transcript 3)*
		I am quite good at it and I try and do the questions at my best ability. And see how it turns out. (transcript 4)
		Just ... I was thinking about later in life like if I failed this what else would I fail. (transcript 5)

They said you're going to be fine, we helped each other study and we really wanted each other to do well (transcript 5)

I felt fine I was like erm I'll try my best whatever score comes up that will the score that I get I did as well as I could and I'm fine with that yeah. (transcript 6)

The fact that well even if I get a low score it was my best I wasn't being lazy and putting no effort in it I did the best I could. (transcript 6)

3. Pressure to achieve in class	Worry about making mistakes	*there are some words that are quite easy for loads of people like some of the year 2 spellings I still get wrong so even though like they are easy I worry that if I get it wrong the teachers will like tell me off or something (transcript 9)*
		I was trying to get lots of work done but because I was pushing myself too hard I kind of like did a load of spellings wrong and like skipped a

couple of pages or something (transcript 9)

Yeah cos everybody else was doing good and they were always like always getting theirs read out or something (transcript 9)

Well sometimes, I don't understand, what we do in science...(transcript 1)

Pressure of working hard all the time

Because like now that I am older I have to do better than I did in year 5. So it kind of pressures you a bit more. (transcript 7)

But like I said before because I've moved up and I am older it is like I have to I'm pressured and I have to know more than I did then (transcript 7)

Probably PE because it's nice to have a little bit of break from the work and the classroom. (transcript 8)

Erm well generally in school I have been getting more English work done. And with maths I have kind of stuck with the same amount. I think that I am like getting the maths that I am supposed to be getting done and do

it. (transcript 9)

4. Social media	Crazes for latest games/apps	*[Fortnite} It's this video game that like a lot of people play and it's really boring. Well it's fine for like but I don't want to talk about it...[all the time] (transcript 2)*
		and at my age some people do inappropriate things on there and I don't really need to see that (transcript 5)

Arguments over group chats/social media	*Ermm well sometimes I have arguments with someone over it (transcript 1).*
	Sometimes if there is drama in the group chat it is really annoying because other people just want to stay out of it because but because they are in the group they can't so they get involved so (transcript 5)
	My two friends in the group chat they were having an argument and they asked well who's on whose side and like, that was stressful. (transcript 5)
Others' involvement of social media	*It's just that loads of people will like have all these fancy phones that they brag about it or say everyone look I've got this new phone and I just never really care because it never really social media is never really a thing I cared about (transcript 6)*
	like I ask if anyone wants to go to the park and some people say no I want to play Fortnite and they stay in and but some people do come to the park and just like sit on the floor and play on their phones or something. And I want to play football, and stuff (transcript 2)

5. Difficulties with peer group	Behaviour of others in class	*They try to wind the teacher up in class, and it's not really funny (transcript 1).*
		If they are being disruptive its really annoying to work with them and I want to get on and if I need help then they can't help me. But I can help them but it's not very good only going one way . (transcript 5)

Differences between groups

Erm well in class er its like on the playground with like friends there have been a lot more arguments as the class has got older and cos there's been like yeah there's been more arguments between people that used to be friends (transcript 7)

because they are now friends with more serious people but then some people have been like friends with popular people and they feel like because they are now older they feel like its important to be popular. Erm so they have started acting like the popular people and they are like a bit more like rude.(transcript 7)

Well of erm I kind of I don't really talk to them a lot and we don't normally contact and yeah if we don't get on together then I just try to stay away. No point trying to get them to like you when they don't. They have obviously made their decision.(transcript 8)

If they talk to me I talk back in a conversation and if they are annoying me I generally just completely ignore (transcript 6)

	People being mean	*Erm it is fine but like I feel like sometimes they can be a bit like mean towards others so I kind of but I am not really sure because they are my friends but then the other people they feel like upset about it so I am not really sure what to do. (transcript 7)*
		Well if sometimes they do things that seem really bad then I am worried that they might do it to me but usually I am not really that worried. (transcript 9)
		I am not really sure but their like they always play with other people and so like friends with people who have been mean to me and stuff so I don't really play with them that much. (transcript 7)
6. Home pressure	family health	*my grandad has cancer at the moment and might die soon so it's making everyone sad (transcript 5)*
		But sometimes I get stressed because my granddad is like always hurting himself and he's had two operations on his knee and he's had an operation on his back and he's on crutches at the moment and my nan broke her foot they couldn't do anything (transcript 7)

conflict	*Well my parents got divorced when I was quite a young age but I didn't find that much of a trouble like when I was quite young I did like miss them when I was at a different house (transcript 6)*
parental stress	*my mum she's stressed and she's coming home late the past few days so that makes me a bit upset as I don't get to see her (transcript 5)*
too much to do	*Sometimes waking up in the morning and getting all of my things done does make me feel stressed (transcript 4)*
	Yeah it's stressful and you have to get everything done and at the weekends or weekdays and I do clubs every day so it's hard. (transcript 5)
	Well I have two sisters who are a bit older than me about six and five years erm so they've done pretty well at school but I just try and do MY best. It doesn't really put that much pressure on me. But a little bit. (transcript 8)
	No. Well sometimes when I am busy when I am like doing something else and I'm like oh yes I need to do my homework and then I get it

done.*(transcript 8)*

support   friendship   *Well my friends always kept me encouraged and said it would be ok* (transcript 1)

In school I would normally talk to a friend instead of an adult because sometimes I find that the adults don't help. (transcript 4)

Well sometimes my friends advise me on the best way to sort out the situation and sometimes they come with me to tell the teacher (transcript 4)

And I had all my friends around me supporting me and I was supporting them (transcript 5)

I would ask my friends what they were finding tricky and if they were finding the same things tricky as me I would help them and they would help me and we could work it out together (transcript 5)

We tell each other things if we're worried about things (transcript 5)

I think my friends are great they never annoy me they are never unkind to me   not trying to bug me they're nice they are supportive when it is like tough and they are good company (transcript 6)

family

Well my mum and dad wouldn't think any less of me if I didn't do well. They   said it would be fine and that you will pass. (transcript 1)

Ermm... Like a bit of both so like somebody would have mentioned, I think my   parents., probably would have mentioned to me that it would be a good idea to do that so I done it sometimes (transcript 3)

Ermm... so if I was would talk to someone about how I was feeling, like my family, and then they would help me. Like to forget about it or solve the problem. (transcript 3)

I probably prefer talking about erm more personal stuff with my family. And if I am in school, then with my teacher. (transcript 3)

I tell mummy and she tells me not to worry about it and to leave it until the next day until you have time. And it doesn't matter when you get it done (transcript 4)

Erm I do. My Nan's the one that I like to talk to because she's really good at hugging and I can just sit with her and chat. (transcript 5)

They were very supportive, like mostly my parents but they still encouraged me to do as well as I could yeah. They were nice and supportive (transcript 6)

school support

He just kept encouraging to keep going and try again (transcript 1)

I haven't asked for them to support going to the teachers because I trust the teachers and I just go to them. (transcript 5)

Er we had like these breakfast mornings before most people would have came to school we went in to the lunch hall and had er well for me it was a another breakfast because I had already had breakfast at home it was nice to sit around with my friends to relax before the tests start. (transcript 6)

No not really they were mostly supportive and like telling us not to be stressed about anything instead of pushing us like super hard and making us feel stressed about it. They were like more supportive than stressful, yeah? (transcript 6)

I like erm our PE teacher tells us to say we were doing see how far we could run he says like when you think you can't do it tell yourself that you can and it's about like mental erm encouraging yourself as well as like physical. (transcript 7)

pets and teddies

And sometimes if I just had an argument with my sister and I feel that it is unfair then I talk to one of my teddies (transcript 4)

I think it helps because the toy is sort of like because it is your own you think it always agrees with you and most toys always look happy (transcript 4)

Sometimes I talk to my teddy because I have a massive teddy in my room and he's kind of like he's been there since I was born so I play with my teddies that I have got. (transcript 5)

I usually just cuddle my hamster.(transcript 7)

sometimes I talk to toys or teddies and I've got like this it might be like a bit too young for me but this for every born doll and it's like really realistic

and I   talk to her. And yeah. (transcript 7)

escape from it all   activities

I just read stuff and then they will go away. (transcript 1)

I just listen without headphones on (transcript 1)

Sometimes I kick a football around? Do a sport (transcript 2)

I listen to music and I talk to my friends over the phone and I play games (transcript 5)

I love doing sport and it is a really nice thing to take your mind off stress it's probably my favourite thing to do (transcript 5)

I play video games with my friends (transcript 5)

if I'm stressed I generally just sit down and go on the computer or something and play a little game by myself or with my friends (transcript 6)

I do sometimes read my book (transcript 7)

listen to music with headphones on.(transcript 8)

nature

Not that I can think of. Sometimes I go into the garden and er watch the world go by basically. And watch all of the trees.(transcript 4)

but when I walk my dog it's nice to get some fresh air because the sun

rises erm over the field that we generally walk   in and also the sun sets in my window where I go to bed so you can see the sun set in my window which is nice to watch when it is the afternoon and stuff (transcript 6)

being alone

Calm myself down, go to my room lie down (transcript 2)

Erm,, I would probably spend time alone. If I was feeling stressed. I would go and spend a bit of time alone. (transcript 3)

I go to my bedroom and lie on my bed. (transcript 5)

I do like if I'm stressed I generally just lie down on my bed and do whatever on my bed (transcript 6)

I do listening to music with headphones on and I usually go to my room to spend time in my room so I go to my room and listen to music (transcript 7)

find it helpful with my friends around I find it more helpful being alone but if I do an activity by myself then I find that easier (transcript 7)

I spend a longer time alone (transcript 8)

active coping   problem solving   *I would try and think about when I got over with. Try and think about all the good things I can do afterwards, for example when I get home I can do whatever I like. and I try and think about those things to look forward to (transcript 4)*

I do think about those things sometimes but then I think I want to focus

on what's happening now and then worry about that when I get to it. *(transcript 4)*

I would linked to talking to a toy, I would speak it all out in different section with each bit of what happened and then think about what I can do to fix it (transcript 4)

I tell myself that at the end I will be proud of myself and that I will have accomplished it in the end so it's like yeah. (transcript 7)

Erm sometimes I say that I can do it and sometimes I just hope for the best (transcript 9)

relaxation strategies

I sometimes meditate because my friend does meditation and my aunt goes to Yoga and meditation and so I do stuff with them (transcript 5)

Erm just like to take deep breaths.... was just walking up and down. I was

pacing. I do a lot of pacing (transcript 8)

to try and think about happy things (transcript 4)

avoidance

Ermm... er... I kind of just ... like think of other things. Then I just forget about it. (transcript 3)

Erm (pause) staying in bed longer than usual I do that (transcript 3)

at the weekend (pause) I wish that the stress or problem would go away because that is just easier but I know that you have to go through that. I I try to forget about it all the time because it is better. (transcript 5)

And I do try to like to I try to forget it (transcript 7)

I would probably try not to think about the stress like forget about it (transcript 8)

Appendix H Frequency of Coping variables

Coping strategy	Frequency			
	Not a lot	A little	Sometimes	A lot
Listen to music with headphones in	69	61	56	27
Go to bedroom and lie on my bed	29	65	68	51
Go for a walk alone or with a pet	133	43	28	9
Spend time alone	32	75	51	55
Stay in bed for longer than usual	94	56	34	29
Wishing that the stress or problem would go away	39	46	58	70
Trying not to think about the stress	44	50	60	59
Playing computer or video games	58	41	51	63

Keep my mind off a stress by doing a sport	66	45	48	53
Keep my mind off the stress by doing an activity that I enjoy	20	47	57	87
Try to think about happy things	31	64	55	62
Do something to calm myself down, meditate, imagine a peaceful place	96	53	37	26
Do something to take my mind off the stress such as play video games, watch TV or read a book	28	30	65	89
Take deep breaths	65	81	38	28

Talk to someone in my family about how I am feeling	31	59	69	52
Talk to a friend about how I am feeling	55	77	52	27
Spend time with my friends	22	35	57	97
Talk to another adult	67	81	44	19
Spend time with a pet	65	28	40	78
Talk to a toy or a teddy	124	31	27	29
Chat to friends on the phone or message on the phone	88	47	41	35
Talk to an adult at school who may help me	87	68	40	16