Published in final edited form as:

J Appl Dev Psychol. 2017 November ; 53: 31–39. doi:10.1016/j.appdev.2017.09.003.

Domain-Specific Daily Hassles, Anxiety, and Delinquent Behaviors among Low-Income, Urban Youth

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Abstract

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

Keywords

daily hassles; anxiety; delinquency; transition; urban youth; low-income

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

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While school transitions – such as the transition into middle school or high school – are normative (Simmons, Burgeson, Carlton-Ford, & Blyth, 1987), they are stressful for many youth (Kingery, Erdley, & Marchall, 2011; Lohaus, Elben, Ball & Klein-Hessling, 2004; Rudolph, Lambert, Clark, & Kurlakowsky, 2001; Simmons et al., 1987). Researchers have linked these school transitions to declines in self-esteem (Blyth, Simmons, & Carlton-Ford, 1983; Eccles, Midgley, & Adler, 1984; Wigfield, Eccles, Mac Iver, Reuman, & Midgley, 1991), increases in depression (Rudolph et al., 2001), and increases in self-medication behavior among youth with low parental involvement (Gottfredson & Hussong, 2011). These declines in emotional well-being may due in part to the confluence of changes experienced at some transitions. For example, in the transition from elementary to middle school, youth typically move from smaller to larger schools, have to adapt to multiple teachers and classrooms, and encounter a larger and often more diverse peer group, all the while experiencing biological, cognitive, and emotional changes (Eccles et al., 1993). In the transition from middle to high school, academic work typically is more demanding, and youth often are in larger, more diverse settings (Akos & Galassi, 2004). Further, opportunities for substance use substantially increase at this transition (Gottfredson & Hussong, 2011).

When everyday hassles are experienced in concert with school transitions, youth's experience of stress may be exacerbated due to the cumulative effect of changes to be managed and underdeveloped coping strategies. The experience of stress may present as anxiety or delinquency, particularly for low-income and ethnic minority youth who also are managing other life stressors (Attar, Guerra, & Tolan, 1994; Bell & Jenkins, 1993; Buka, Stichick, Birdthistle, & Earls, 2001; Davis et al., 2014). Knowing whether and how hassles heighten low-income adolescents' vulnerability to anxiety or delinquency at times of normative school transitions would be helpful to parents, school counselors, and others involved in students' lives in facilitating student transitions into middle school or high school. This is especially true for low-income adolescents, because if low-income adolescents get off-track academically, it becomes even more challenging for them, relative to middle- or high-income youth, to recover (Newman, Myers, Newman, Lohman, & Smith, 2000). Ultimately, academic performance in high school is associated with earning potential in adulthood (French, Homer, Popovici, & Robins, 2015), making this a very real and not a hypothetical concern. The first purpose of the present study was to evaluate the association of hassles with anxiety and delinquency prior to and during a major normative school transition.

Daily Hassles: The Value of a Domain-Specific Approach

Several recent studies of hassles during adolescence have demonstrated the utility of a domain-specific approach. For example, Booth and Anthony (2015) examined hassles in the family, peer, school, neighborhood, and resource domains; Sim (2000) studied hassles from parents, friends, and school. One way of categorizing these stressors is whether they occur in the context of a relationship (e.g., interactions with individuals such as family members, peers, and teachers) or are non-relational (e.g., stressors that do not at their core involve a conflict with an individual). Non-relational hassles in our study and in the work of others are contextually-based: they occur in specific locations such as neighborhoods or schools. These

are contexts in which adolescents spend a significant amount of time, and based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory are "microsystems" and have the most direct influence on adolescent behavior. Booth and Anthony (2015), in a cross-sectional study with 315 low-income, diverse adolescents in grades six through eight, found that family hassles – but not hassles in other domains – were associated with delinquency. Hassles in all domains were associated, however, with substance use. In a cross-sectional study of 438 Korean adolescents, Sim (2000) found that hassles from parents, friends, and school were positively associated with depression, with the strongest associations observed for hassles from friends. In addition, hassles with parents and from school, but not from friends, were positively associated with antisocial behaviors, with the strongest associations observed for school hassles. A second purpose of the present study was to evaluate the contribution of hassles in specific domains to anxiety and delinquency in a sample of low-income, urban adolescents.

Daily Hassles and the Stress of School Transitions: Grade Level as a Moderator

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

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

Given that the timing of changes in parent-child and peer relationships differs for youth entering middle school versus high school, and the salience of specific hassles also may differ for youth transitioning into middle school versus high school, it is likely that the experiences of youth moving from elementary to middle school will differ from the experiences of youth moving from middle to high school (Brovi et al., 2014). A third purpose of the present study was to evaluate grade level as a moderator of associations between domain-specific hassles and anxiety and delinquency prior to and during a normative school transition in a low-income, urban sample.

The Current Study

Daily hassles are associated with increases in depression, anxiety, and delinquency during adolescence (Monroe, 1983; Sim, 2000; Vinkers et al., 2014) and may exacerbate the stress

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

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

Method

Participants

Youth were recruited as part of a larger longitudinal study focused on stress and maladjustment in 358 low-income youth and parent dyads (Project COPE). For the current study, the first two waves of data, collected one year apart, were utilized. The analytic sample consisted of 353 adolescents (163 males; 91.8% African American; see Table 1 for cohort specific age, sex, and race descriptives) who were either in grade 5 ($N=186$) or grade 8 ($N=167$) at the start of the study (Wave 1) and who either transitioned from an elementary to a middle school or from a middle school to a high school between the first and second wave of data collection. Five students who did not transition between schools between waves 1 and 2 were not included in the analyses. The families in the study were of low socioeconomic status (SES): nearly three quarters (71.1%) of households reported earning \$601 per week or less. Maternal education also was low: 23.4% of the sample had not completed high school, 31.2% held a high school diploma or general education diploma (GED) as their highest degree, 23.6% had some college, 12.8% had an Associate's or Vocational Degree, and 8.8% had a Bachelor's degree or higher. Most (86.1%) of the maternal caregivers were the natural birth mothers of the participating child, but grandmothers (7.1%), adopted mothers (2.0%), other female relatives (3.6%), stepmothers

(0.8%), and fathers' girlfriends (0.3%) also served as female caregivers. A sixth of the sample (17.8%) lived with both their biological mother and father at baseline.

Measures

Hassles—Domain-specific hassles were self-reported at Wave 1 and Wave 2 with items from the *Daily Hassles Scale* (Seidman et al., 1995). Participants were informed that a hassle “is something that gets on your nerves or bugs you. It could bother you a lot, or hardly at all.” Academic hassles (Cronbach alpha = .71 at Wave 1 and .80 at Wave 2) were assessed with 4 items (e.g., “school being too hard”). Hassles with parents (Cronbach alpha = .59 at Wave 1 and .66 at Wave 2) were assessed with 3 items (e.g., “parents being too nosy about what you do”). Hassles with friends (Cronbach alpha = .73 at Wave 1 and .85 at Wave 2) were assessed with 3 items (e.g., “Trouble with friends over beliefs, opinions, and choices”). Finally, neighborhood hassles (Cronbach alpha = .75 at Wave 1 and .74 at Wave 2) were assessed with 6 items (e.g., “being scared by someone in your neighborhood [scared walking alone]” or “living in a noisy neighborhood”). It is important to note that although two items from the neighborhood hassles subscale involve an interaction with a person, they are classified as non-relational hassles because the scale is measuring contextual stressors and these items do not indicate an interpersonal interaction. Adolescents indicated whether a hassle had occurred or not within the past 6 months. If a hassle had not occurred, participants received a score of 1 for that item. Hassles that had occurred were rated on intensity on a scale from 2 (*not at all a hassle*) to 5 (*a very big hassle*). Seidman et al. (1995) report excellent validity for the original measure. Thus, possible scales ranges were 4–20 for academic hassles, 3–15 for hassles with parents, 3–15 for hassles with friends, and 6–30 for neighborhood hassles. Youth anywhere on the continuum of scores were included in the analyses.

Because the measure of hassles at Wave 1 referenced the past 6 months, and youth were in grade 5 or grade 8 at the time which was prior to their transition into middle school or into high school, we refer to these as hassles experienced prior to the school transition. Conversely, the measure of hassles at Wave 2, collected one year later, also referenced the past 6 months, but youth now were in grade 6 or grade 9. Thus, the measure captured hassles experienced during the school transition. Importantly, students who attended private schools who did not transition from an elementary to a middle school or from a middle school to a high school were excluded from the analyses.

Anxiety—Symptoms of anxiety, both physical and emotional, were self-reported at Wave 1 and Wave 2 from the 28-item Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale (RCMAS; Reynolds & Richmond, 1978). Cronbach alphas were .89 at Wave 1 and Wave 2. Youth responded “yes” or “no” to each statement to indicate whether they felt the statement was true for him or her. A sample item is: “I wake up scared some of the time.” As noted by Maruish (2004), the RCMAS has adequate validity. Higher scores on this measure reflect greater anxiety.

Delinquency—The 8-item delinquency subscale, self-reported by adolescents at Wave 1 and Wave 2 from The Problem Behavior Frequency Scales (PBFS; Farrell, Kung, White, &

Valois, 2000), was used to index delinquency. Frequency of behavior in the past 30 days was assessed using a scale from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*20 times or more*). A sample item is “in the last 30 days, how many times have you skipped school?” Internal consistency (Cronbach alpha) for delinquency was .72 at Wave 1 and .74 at Wave 2. The PBFS has been used with thousands of youth and have excellent validity (Farrell, Sullivan, Goncey, & Le, 2016).

Procedures

Participants were recruited from neighborhoods within (neighborhood blinded for review) and the neighboring counties with high levels of violence and/or poverty according to police statistics and 2000 census data. The study was advertised through community agencies and events, and by canvassing qualifying neighborhoods via flyers posted door-to-door. Families were eligible if they spoke English, had a fifth or an eighth grader, and if the primary caregiver could be present for the interview. Sixty-three percent of eligible participants agreed to be in the study, which is consistent with studies using similar designs and populations (Tingen et al., 2013; Vangeepuram, Townsend, Arniella, Goytia, & Horowitz, 2016). It was never the case that more than one child in the household was eligible to participate in the study, thus parents always reported on the child participating in the study. Interviews were conducted annually, primarily in participants’ homes, by trained research staff. Interviewers thoroughly reviewed the parent consent forms with the family prior to separating parents and children and conducting a separate assent procedure with the child. A Certificate of Confidentiality was obtained from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to protect families’ responses.

Interviewer training took place over a course of 4 weeks. Interviewers completed training on research protocols and interview techniques, and also completed practice sessions, paperwork, and related assignments. Research staff trained and gave feedback to the interviewers before they could start the actual interview process. Feedback also was obtained from a subsample of families who were interviewed by phone within two weeks of completing their interview to make sure that the research staff was professional and adhered to the protocol throughout the study. Interviewers typically had Bachelor’s degrees or Master’s degrees, although a small percentage had not yet completed a degree. Interviewers ranged in age from 20 to 55, and included both men and women. Approximately half of the interviewing staff was African American. *T*-tests for the effects of interviewer race and sex revealed no systematic biases, $p > .10$. Interviews lasted approximately 2.5 hours and participants received \$50 in gift cards per family at each wave.

Results

Attrition Analyses

Analyses were conducted to determine if there were any significant differences between participants who attrited ($N = 40$) versus participants who remained in both waves of the study ($N = 313$). *T*-tests were conducted on baseline maladjustment (e.g., Wave 1 anxiety and delinquency) and child age. Participants who remained in the study did not differ from participants who attrited on age $t(351) = 0.92, p = .36$; anxiety $t(348) = 1.11, p = .27$, or delinquency $t(343) = .27, p = .79$. Chi square analyses were conducted for the categorical

variables of sex ($\chi^2(1) = .25, p = .74$), race (African American versus other races; $\chi^2(1) = .03, p = 1.00$), and caregivers' marital status ($\chi^2(1) = 1.37, p = .51$), revealing no significant differences. In contrast, the Chi square for parental education was significant, ($\chi^2(4) = 16.07, p = .003$), revealing that youth from less well educated families were more likely to attrit than youth from families that were better educated.

Descriptive Information and Correlational Analyses

Table 2 presents descriptive information domain specific hassles, anxiety, and delinquency across waves 1 and 2 by grade level. Table 3 presents zero-order correlations among the study variables. As seen in Table 3, hassles of the same type were modestly correlated across waves among both cohorts. Sex largely was unassociated with other study variables. Independent *t*-tests were conducted to assess whether males and females differed on any of the hassles or maladjustment variables; none of the analyses were significant (all *ts* < 1.48, all *ps* > .05) indicating no differences.

Tests of the Research Questions: Summary of Analytical Approach

Two path models were utilized to test the primary study hypotheses using Mplus version 7.31 (Muthén & Muthén, 2015), which allowed missing data to be handled with full information maximum likelihood (FIML). FIML uses all information in the data for analyses, allows for less biased estimates, and is an efficient missing data technique (Wang & Wang, 2012). The models assessed the extent to which parent hassles, friend hassles, academic hassles, and neighborhood hassles, in addition to baseline levels of maladjustment and adolescent sex, predicted anxiety and delinquency at Wave 2, when youth were in grade 6 or grade 9 and attending a new school.

The first model used youth reports of hassles at Wave 1 as the predictor and assessed whether hassles experienced prior to the transition into middle school or into high school was associated with anxiety or delinquency. The second model used youth reports of hassles at Wave 2 as the predictor and assessed whether hassles experienced during the transition into middle school or into high school was associated with anxiety or delinquency. Hassles experienced prior to the transition were controlled in this model. The fit for the models were assessed using the χ^2 value, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR; Hu & Bentler, 1999). Values of 0.90 or above for the CFI (Bentler, 1990) and 0.08 or below for the RMSEA (Browne & Cudeck, 1993) indicated that the model adequately fit the data. Multiple group analyses were used to determine if the pattern of associations between hassles and anxiety and delinquency differed by grade level. Unconstrained models where the path coefficients were allowed to vary by grade were compared to constrained models where path coefficients were set to be equal across grade. The fit for the unconstrained and constrained models were evaluated by examining the χ^2 difference test with the Satorra-Bentler scaled chi-square, which produces a *p* value, and differences in the models based on the CFI, RMSEA, and the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC).

Path Model Findings: Do Hassles Predict Anxiety and Delinquency at Wave 2?

In addressing the first research question, which focused on hassles experienced prior to the school transition (e.g., when the participants were in grade 5 or grade 8), fit statistics were mixed but overall favored an unconstrained model over a constrained model, indicating that an unconstrained model fit the data better than a constrained model and that the results were moderated by grade. The sample-size adjusted BIC values were similar for the two models [$N = 302$; Unconstrained: $BIC = 3302.21$; Constrained: $BIC = 3296.95$]. However, the RMSEA, CFI, and SRMR were superior in the unconstrained model [Unconstrained: $RMSEA = .027$ 90% CI $[0, .129]$; $CFI = .997$; $SRMR = .013$; Constrained: $RMSEA = .075$ 90% CI $[.029, .117]$; $CFI = .921$; $SRMR = .032$].

Results for the unconstrained model are presented in Figure 1, which presents data on associations of pre-transition hassles with adjustment one year later. As seen in the figure, parent hassles were associated with delinquency at wave 2 for the older, but not for the younger, cohort. Friend hassles were associated with anxiety at wave 2 for the older, but not for the younger, cohort. Neighborhood hassles were positively associated with anxiety at wave 2 for the younger cohort, but negatively associated with anxiety at wave 2 for the older cohort. Academic hassles were not positively or negatively associated with maladjustment.

In addressing the second research question, which focused on hassles experienced during the school transition (e.g., when the participants were in grade 6 or 9), fit statistics again were mixed but overall favored an unconstrained model over a constrained model, indicating that an unconstrained model fit the data better than a constrained model and that the results were moderated by grade. Wave 1 hassles were controlled in this analysis. The sample-size adjusted BIC values were similar for the two models [$N = 295$; Unconstrained: $BIC = 3187.904$; Constrained: $BIC = 3184.789$]. However, the RMSEA, CFI, and SRMR were superior in the unconstrained model [Unconstrained: $RMSEA = 0$ 90% CI $[0, .124]$; $CFI = 1.0$; $SRMR = .008$; Constrained: $RMSEA = .088$ 90% CI $[.054, .121]$; $CFI = .88$; $SRMR = .029$].

Results for the unconstrained model are presented in Figure 2. As seen in the figure, friend hassles were associated with anxiety and delinquency at wave 2 for the older, but not for the younger, cohort. Academic and parent hassles were associated with anxiety at wave 2 for the younger, but not for the older, cohort. Neighborhood hassles were negatively associated with delinquency at wave 2 for the older cohort only. With respect to the stability paths, anxiety was stable over time for both younger and older cohorts. In contrast, the stability path from wave 1 to wave 2 delinquency was only significant for the younger cohort.

Discussion

The current study addressed influences of relational and non-relational hassles on maladjustment both prior to and during school transitions among low-income, urban youth. The effect of timing of the transition was considered in these patterns by assessing moderation by grade cohort, with an expectation that older youth (youth who were in grade 8 at wave 1) would show a stronger association between relational hassles and maladjustment relative to younger youth (who were in grade 5 at wave 1). We expected that

relational hassles would be positively associated with anxiety; that neighborhood hassles would be positively associated with delinquency; and that academic hassles would be positively associated with both types of maladjustment across the transition into middle school or high school. These hypotheses were partially confirmed. In the sections below we discuss the key findings in light of our hypotheses and their implications. Our study assessed how hassles experienced both *prior to* and *during* the transition into middle school or into high school was associated with anxiety and delinquency, accounting for baseline levels of maladjustment and sex. Differences between the older youth and younger youth – transition into middle school or into high school – were present in both models. Additionally, there were different relationships between hassles and anxiety and delinquency prior to versus during the school transition. It is important to keep these differences in mind because our data show that for some youth, specific hassles contributed to anxiety or delinquency at one time point, but not another. For example, hassles with parents experienced *prior to* the school transition were positively associated with delinquency in older youth; no such relation was observed for hassles with parents experienced *during* the transition into high school. Academic hassles were unrelated to adjustment *prior to* the school transition in younger youth, but were positively associated with anxiety *during* the transition into middle school for younger youth.

Relational Hassles and Associations with Anxiety

Hassles with parents and with friends experienced prior to (wave 1) and during (wave 2) the school transition were associated with anxiety for some youth, partially confirming our hypothesis that relational hassles would be associated with anxiety. Specifically, hassles with friends were positively associated with anxiety both prior to and during the school transition, but only for older youth. Hassles with parents at wave 2 were positively associated with anxiety for younger youth. The importance of peers during this stage of adolescence, and developmental differences in the nature of friendships between the younger and older cohorts in our sample likely explained some of this finding. As friendships mature, they become more intimate and youth are more likely to experience rejection and conflict (Selman et al., 1977; Trevatt, 2015). Concurrently, these friendships spark due to a need for belonging (Slee et al., 2012). Hassles within friendships may invoke anxiety if they initiate possible rejection or social exclusion.

Hassles with parents painted a different picture. Hassles with parents were associated with anxiety among younger youth during the school transition (wave 2), when they had landed in grade 6, as was expected. However, hassles with parents were associated with delinquency prior to the school transition (wave 1) among the older cohort, when youth were in grade 8. Youth transitioning into middle school, relative to youth transitioning into high school, experience a greater number of biological changes (e.g., puberty), and a greater number of changes related to academic demands and environment (Barber & Olsen, 2004; Blyth et al., 1983; Brovi et al., 2014; Eccles et al., 1993; Kim, Oesterle, Catalano, & Hawkins, 2015; Simmons & Blyth, 1987). Our data suggest that youth who experienced hassles in one domain also experienced hassles in other domains. This is consistent with Developmental Cascades theory (Masten & Cicchetti, 2010) which refers to the process of developmental outcomes depending on the accumulation of various interactions and transactions

experienced across domains. In the case of our study, perhaps arguments with parents, on top of these biological and academic stressors, “tipped the scales” and contributed to the overall stress load youth were experiencing. This could explain our finding between hassles with parents and anxiety among the younger youth. Additionally, if youth have underdeveloped coping skills, they may not know how to deal with increased stress. This may account for our finding that parental hassles, prior to school transition, was associated with delinquency among older youth. Recent research has found that parental solicitation – which includes parents initiating conversations with teens, and talking with teens’ friends – was associated with positive coping strategies during middle and high school after accounting for baseline levels of coping, age, sex, household income, and parental knowledge (Mize & Kliewer, 2017). Perhaps delinquent behaviors are a maladaptive coping mechanism for the teens when the relationship with their parent is conflictual. Another possibility is that the older adolescents in our sample were experiencing a poor environment-fit with their parents. According to Eccles et al. (1993), when adolescents feel that they are not getting the autonomy they need from their parents, dissonance rises in the dyad. The youth, therefore, may be trying to push the boundaries further as they are experiencing conflicts with their parents.

Neighborhood Hassles and Associations with Delinquency

Our expectations regarding neighborhood hassles and delinquency were not confirmed. One reason this might be the case is that unlike violence exposure, for which there is a strong, established association with delinquency (cf, Fowler, Tompsett, Braciszewski, Jacques-Tiura, & Baltes, 2009), hassles are not particularly traumatic and do not evoke threat appraisals in the same way that witnessing or directly experiencing community or peer violence evokes threat (Kliewer & Sullivan, 2008). Rather, in our analysis of the contribution of hassles prior to the school transition a finding emerged indicating that neighborhood hassles were positively associated with anxiety among the younger youth and negatively associated with anxiety among the older youth. This differential association of neighborhood hassles and anxiety across grade cohorts may be due to desensitization effects. Desensitization is a phenomenon in which after experiencing repeated exposures to certain stressors (i.e., violence), the impacts (e.g., internalizing symptoms such as anxiety) first increase, then stabilize, then decrease (Funk, Baldacci, Pasold, & Baumgardner, 2004; Kennedy & Ceballo, 2016; Mrug, Madan, & Windle, 2016). Importantly, among urban samples a distinction is made between the long-term impacts of violence and associated stressors on internalizing versus externalizing symptoms, with the hypothesis that youth will experience a decrease in internalizing symptoms over time and a simultaneous increase in externalizing symptoms. Several of our items examining neighborhood hassles could be applicable to the desensitization phenomena (e.g., “...scared walking alone...,” “being approached by a drug dealer...,” or “seeing a homeless person...”). Several research groups, including Mrug et al. (2016), have found support for the desensitization hypothesis. In their longitudinal sample of 704 adolescents, Mrug and colleagues found that high levels of exposure to violence at age 11, as well as exposure to violence in multiple contexts, was associated with lower levels of self-reported internalizing symptoms two years later at age 13, and higher rates of violent behavior at age 18. Exposure to violence at wave 2 in their study was associated with decreases in caregiver-reported internalizing symptoms and

increases in caregiver-reported externalizing symptoms at wave 3, accounting for a range of control variables. However, age did not moderate their effects. It may be the case that desensitization is accounting for the observed effects with the older youth in our sample.

Academic Hassles and Associations with Anxiety and Delinquency

Academic hassles were associated with anxiety, and not delinquency, and only during the school transition (wave 2) among the younger youth. The drastic change in classroom style, number of teachers, and work expectations from elementary to middle school (Barber & Olsen, 2004; Eccles et al., 1993) likely contributed to this finding. Biological and cognitive changes brought on by puberty also can affect academic performance and self-esteem and contribute to anxiety (Blyth et al., 1983; Simmons & Blyth, 1987). Consistent with Developmental Cascades Theory (Masten & Cicchetti, 2010), these physical changes and changes in academic demands, environment, and social relationships may overwhelm the child, bringing forth anxious behavior.

It is difficult to say why academic hassles were not associated with delinquency. It is possible that the younger youth do not, yet, have the freedom to engage in delinquent behaviors. Perhaps a future study could examine high and low autonomy as a moderator between academic hassles and externalizing outcomes.

Strengths and Applied Implications

Strengths of this study include examination of domain-specific hassles, a focus on key periods of transition, inclusion of two cohorts of youth, controls for prior maladjustment in the models, and examination of two outcomes. Our data show that hassles experienced prior to a school transition can be different from hassles experienced during a school transition. Our findings also suggest the possibility that the maladaptive outcomes associated with hassles can be somewhat different depending on when the hassles are experienced. Additionally, our findings are applicable to real world settings and could be considered useful to those involved in students' lives in facilitating low-income student transitions into middle school or high school; school counselors, teachers, and parents would likely find this research most useful.

Our data show that hassles experienced prior to and during school transition are associated with anxiety, and to a lesser extent, delinquency. Therefore, preparations should be made in the grade prior to the transition (e.g., grade 5 or grade 8). One suggestion would be for teachers and/or administrators from the school to which students are expected to transition physically go to the school of the transitioning students and talk them about the changes that are normally experienced (e.g., class changes, increased teachers). Future research could investigate this as a possible intervention.

School counselors would be especially useful for students experiencing hassles with friends. Our data demonstrate that hassles with friends, both prior to and during school transition, among older youth are associated with anxiety. Since this is a low-income sample, parents may be working odd shifts or not have transportation, and therefore cannot get their children to social events. Additionally, low-income families may not be able to afford for children to go and spend time with their friends outside of the home (e.g., going to the movies). Thus,

the school may be one of the few places friends are able to interact in this sample. This suggests that students could be losing their friends in the transition and feeling more alone; this information is helpful counselors in knowing what symptoms of psychological distress to look for – in this case anxiety – among incoming students and what may be the reason for these symptoms – in this case difficulties with friends. School counselors could also be helpful to adolescents experiencing arguments with parents by helping them develop the appropriate coping skills needed to so they do not turn to maladaptive behaviors – like delinquency in our study – as a means of coping with the conflict they are experiencing with their parents.

Having extracurricular activities at the school may be helpful in mitigating the relationship between neighborhood hassles and anxiety. Extracurricular activities would allow students to spend less time in the stressful environment and perhaps mitigate some of the anxiety experienced. Additionally, free extracurricular activities conducted at the school would give low-income students more time to be with their friends. Finally, academic hassles experienced during the school transition (at wave 2) was positively associated with anxiety for younger youth. Teachers would likely be the most helpful by being mindful of the stress experienced in transition. One way to do this could be starting the curriculum with a work load and environment that the students are used to from the prior year and then slowly increase to the higher demands that are needed to meet the academic benchmarks required. Teachers and schools could also have extracurricular activities for new student cohorts where time could be utilized for homework and/or tutoring, this would be especially helpful in this sample because low-income families may not be able to afford tutoring for their children. Such an activity could be helpful not only to the academic hassles, but also to neighborhood hassles as mentioned before.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Despite the strengths of our study, there are a number of limitations which should be noted. Although arguments with parents was positively associated with delinquency, reliability of this 3-item measure was lower than desired. Two of the items on the measure involved parent-child interactions, while the third item involved the child witnessing discord between the parents. The low frequency of youth living with two parents in this sample might have affected children's response to that item.

Given that our study is limited to a predominately low-income, minority sample in an urban area, our results are most applicable in that context. This does not, however, mean that our results cannot be applied to other samples. The importance of parent and peer relationships is salient among all youth; daily hassles are also experienced by most youth of multiple races and levels of income (Dumont & Provost, 1999; Seidman et al., 1995; Suarez-Morales & Lopez, 2009), therefore our conclusions and suggestions presented for combating hassles and maladjustment could still be helpful for other samples. However, we still urge future researchers to empirically examine the relations between hassles and maladjustment in these other samples.

Our data indicate, that at least for some youth, hassles are an important contributor to well-being during key school transitions. However, the mechanisms by which these hassles

operate have not been explored in depth. Future research, therefore, might focus on mechanisms linking hassles and shifts in maladjustment, such as compromised coping, threat appraisals, or changes in key social relationships. For example, research by Sim (2000) revealed that social support influences the relation between hassles, depression, and antisocial behaviors, suggesting a mediating effect. This could be examined more extensively. The extent to which the findings regarding parent hassles experienced prior to and during school transition are due to a general negative appraisal effect that resulted in many situations being evaluated as a hassle, or changes in the parent-adolescent relationship, or a combination of the two, could be explored. Further, factors that may diminish, or alternatively exacerbate the impact of hassles have not been examined and we, unfortunately, did not extensively examine the specific mechanisms of how hassles experienced prior to the school transition are different than hassles experienced during the school transition. Future research, therefore, might focus on moderators of the impact of hassles, such as the presence of other stressors in youth's lives. Finally, we did not have records for academic achievements of the participants. Thus, we are unable to be sure if our finding linking academic hassles to subsequent anxiety in younger youth are due to older youth being less engaged academically. Future research should consider academic achievement as a control variable when assessing cohort differences in academic stress. Finally, the combined effect of grade level and school transition should be mentioned. The timing at which the transitions in our study occurred (i.e., from grade 5 to grade 6 and from grade 8 to grade 9) coincide with a host of biological and social changes adolescents experience. The biological changes (e.g., puberty) are occurring as a natural part of development, while the social changes are occurring both for developmental reasons (e.g., social cognitive changes) and due to prompts from the school transition. Thus, it is likely a combination of the period of adolescence and the school transition that contribute to the exacerbation of hassles.

In conclusion, our findings confirm past research that minor stressors affect maladjustment, and hassles that occur in relationships are in part responsible for that impact. We add to the research gap by assessing the contribution of daily hassles both prior to and during school transitions. The multiple changes occurring during these points of school transition and crucial time of development may have exacerbated the effects of hassles on maladjustment. This research would be useful in developing interventions for low-income students transitioning to new schools as well as counselors and parents. Further, we believe that youth who have good quality relationships with their peers and parents will make this time of transition less stressful.

Acknowledgments

This work was supported by National Institutes of Health grants K01 DA015442 01A1 and R21 DA 020086-02. We thank the many students and staff members who worked on Project COPE as well as the families who shared their lives with us over the course of the study.

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Highlights

Daily hassles predicted changes in adjustment across school transitions

Daily hassles more often predicted anxiety than delinquency across transitions.

The impact of hassles on changes in adjustment varied by type of hassle and age.

Developmental context is important to consider when evaluating the role of hassles.

Figure 1.

Longitudinal path model predicting adjustment in grades 6 and 9 across the middle school and high school transition years from hassles and adjustment in grades 5 and 8 and adolescent sex. Youth reported on their experience of hassles over the previous 6 months. Values to the left of the/are for the younger cohort; values to the right of the/are for the older cohort. Values are presented above their corresponding line. Dashed lines indicate non-significant paths. Non-significant beta weights are not displayed to improve readability. $N = 295$. $\chi^2(4) = 4.44$, $p = .35$; RMSEA = .027, 90% CI [0, .129]; CFI = .997; SRMR = .013. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Figure 2.

Longitudinal path model predicting adjustment in grades 6 and 9 across the middle school and high school transition years from hassles and adjustment in grades 6 and 9 and adolescent sex, controlling for hassles at wave 1. Youth reported on their experience of hassles over the previous 6 months. Values to the left of the/are for the younger cohort; values to the right of the/are for the older cohort. Values are presented above their corresponding line. Dashed lines indicate non-significant paths. Non-significant beta weights are not displayed to improve readability. $N = 295$. $X^2(4) = 3.97$, $p = .41$; RMSEA = 0, 90% CI [0, .124]; CFI = 1.00; SRMR = .008. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 1

Descriptive Information of Participants in Grade 5 and Grade 8 at Wave 1

	Grade 5 (<i>n</i> = 186)	Grade 8 (<i>n</i> = 167)
<i>M</i> age (<i>SD</i>)	10.78 (.63)	13.68 (.82)
Age Range	10–12	12–16
% Male	48.4%	43.7%
% African American	91.4%	92.0%

Table 2

Descriptive Information (Mean, SD, Range) on Domain-Specific Hassles, Anxiety, and Delinquency across Waves 1 and 2 by Developmental Level

Variable	Wave 1 (<i>N</i> = 353)		Wave 2 (<i>N</i> = 313)	
	Younger (<i>N</i> = 186)	Older (<i>N</i> = 167)	Younger (<i>N</i> = 167)	Older (<i>N</i> = 146)
Parent Hassles	6.76	7.10	6.35	7.36
	(2.81)	(2.89)	(2.71)	(2.77)
	3–15	3–15	3–15	3–15
Friend Hassles	7.20	7.18	6.10	6.74
	(3.10)	(2.97)	(2.99)	(2.90)
	3–15	3–14	3–15	3–15
Academic Hassles	10.76	11.50	10.31	11.14
	(4.08)	(3.95)	(4.40)	(3.80)
	4–20	4–20	4–20	4–20
Neighborhood Hassles	13.73	12.17	11.09	11.39
	(5.69)	(4.39)	(4.32)	(4.08)
	6–30	6–25	6–30	6–27
Anxiety	10.76	8.30	7.72	7.21
	(6.12)	(5.65)	(6.12)	(6.07)
	1–26	0–24	0–28	0–26
Delinquency	1.18	1.69	1.16	2.27
	(2.04)	(2.84)	(2.11)	(3.85)
	0–12	0–15	0–13	0–30

Note. There was a one-year time lag between waves of data collection. Youth either were in grade 5 or grade 8 at Wave 1.

Table 3

Zero Order Correlations among the Study Variables by Grade Cohort

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1 W1 Academic Hassles		.32***	.46***	.25***	.40***	.13	.38***	.07	.35***	.24**	.19*	.19*	.04
2 W2 Academic Hassles	.58***		.17*	.38***	.25***	.50***	.24**	.38***	.30***	.43***	.10	.23**	.06
3 W1 Neighborhood Hassles	.27**	.20*		.27***	.39***	.17*	.47***	.15	.37***	.35***	.19*	.07	-.03
4 W2 Neighborhood Hassles	.09	.20*	.37***		.17*	.49***	.20*	.46***	.32***	.33***	.10	.21**	.03
5 W1 Parent Hassles	.28***	.22**	.28***	.08		.28***	.41***	.07	.28***	.20**	.17*	.12	.14
6 W2 Parent Hassles	.23**	.37***	.13	.33***	.30***		.32***	.57***	.37***	.52***	-.02	.11	-.11
7 W1 Friend Hassles	.19*	.23**	.26**	.27***	.44***	.22*		.27**	.42***	.34***	.13	.07	-.06
8 W2 Friend Hassles	.15	.22*	.11	.36***	.26**	.53***	.39***		.33***	.33***	.02	.15	-.09
9 W1 Anxiety	.27***	.21*	.27***	.05	.26**	.21*	.29***	.32***		.60***	.26***	.18*	-.02
10 W2 Anxiety	.17*	.21*	.06	.12	.24**	.35***	.36***	.46***	.58***		.03	.13	-.08
11 W1 Delinquency	.01	.07	.05	0	.10	.08	-.04	.19*	.12	.11		.34***	.06
12 W2 Delinquency	-.06	.02	.10	-.05	.20*	.21*	.07	.23**	.05	.12	.16		.17*
13 Sex (0 = female, 1 = male)	-.10	-.10	.01	-.02	-.12	-.04	-.10	-.03	-.04	-.10	-.08	.01	

Note. W1 = Wave 1; W2 = Wave 2. The top half of the table shows correlations for younger youth ($n = 151 - 186$), while the bottom half shows correlations for older youth ($n = 137 - 167$).

* $p < .05$;

** $p < .01$;

*** $p < .001$.