

ABSTRACT

Stress in adolescence can cause adverse effects in adolescence such as higher levels of depression and anxiety (Kim et al., 2003). Past research indicates stress has negative implications for adolescent well-being (Nicolai et al., 2013). Consequently, a comprehensive understanding of the factors that exacerbate or relieve stress is crucial. The current study considers the role of stress as a possible predictor of internalizing symptoms. Further, we investigate how physiological regulation (i.e., RSA and SCL) affects the relation between stress and internalizing symptoms. This study aims to examine stress and adjustment in adolescents with physiological regulation as a moderating factor.

Participants were 180 adolescents (118 girls; 62 boys; M age = 14.09 years). Adolescents completed the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; Cohen et al., 1983) to report their overall stress levels (e.g., “I worry a lot of the time; 1 = Not at All True, 5 = Really True”). To assess internalizing symptoms, they completed questions from a depression scale (e.g., “In the past week I was sad, lonely, or fearful; CES-D; Eaton et al., 2004).

Two measures were used to assess physiological regulation: respiration sinus arrhythmia (RSA) to assess parasympathetic nervous system regulation and skin conductance levels (SCL) to assess sympathetic nervous system regulation. To assess RSA, three disposable electrodes were applied to the participants’ torsos to monitor heart rate and a belt was applied around their diaphragms to monitor respiration. To assess SCL, two disposable gel electrodes were applied to the participants’ ring and pointer fingers. Physiological responses are recorded while the participants sit quietly for three minutes.

Analyses will consider stress as a predictor of internalizing symptoms. They will also test whether physiological regulation affects the relationship between stress and internalizing symptoms. We will also examine sex differences among stress, indicators of regulation, and internalizing symptoms.