



A REAL WORLD STUDY TO
LOOK AT THE
PERFROMANCE AND
WELLBEING OF STUDENTS IN
SECONDARY EDUCATION
- A SINGLE SEX, FEMALE
SECONDARY COLLEGE

The Study and Hypothesis

The hypothesis to be tested was simply that Mental Toughness is related to Performance, Behaviour and Well-being. This embraced considerations of Career Aspirations and perceived Bullying. A study was set up with the co-operation of a secondary college. The study covered the entire year 10 group (age 15 years), some 130 pupils. All pupils participated – no self-selection was permitted.

The following data was collected from each pupil:

- Mental Toughness – through MTQ48
- Careers Aspirations – short, structured questionnaire
- Perceptions of Bullying – short, structured questionnaire

The following data was provided by the College/year tutors about each pupil.

- Year tutors' assessment of students Mental Toughness – structured assessment
- Cognitive Ability measures – CATS for verbal, non-verbal and quantitative abilities

The data was analysed by researchers at the University of Hull under the expert guidance of Dr Peter Clough, Head of Psychology who is also the developer of the Mental Toughness concept and measure.

The Results

What emerged was a fascinating set of results. The study showed the following:

The Students own assessment of their Mental Toughness was significantly different from Tutor assessments. The student's assessment (through MTQ48) revealed much lower Mental Toughness scores than that predicted by the teachers. (See figures 1-9 for pupil MTQ48 scores).

This is not a criticism of teachers/tutors. The same type of results is achieved in the workplace where managers consistently make better selection and development decisions about their staff if they use psychometrics than if they use only their judgement.

A link between Mental Toughness and ability/performance

- Analysis of MTQ48 scores showed correlations between Mental Toughness and ability. This was found when comparing to CAT scores and KS3 scores from the FFT (KS3 Mean Teacher Assessment Fine Grade and KS3 Mean Test Assessment Fine Grade)
- Similar patterns emerged when using teacher ratings of Mental Toughness and comparing these to KS3 scores
- This confirms results achieved elsewhere. Improving mental toughness can lead to better ability scores. It is thought that the more mentally tough a person is, the more likely they are to do well in a test (because they are more confident) and the more likely they are to absorb learning because they are more confident and feel more in control

A link between Mental Toughness and the student's approach to subjects and classes

- The study showed significant differences between pupils with higher and lower levels of Mental Toughness and their positive approach towards subjects. Those with higher mental toughness

reported liking many more subjects they were taking, while those with lower mental toughness reported disliking many more subjects

A link between Mental Toughness and reported bullying

- The study showed that there was a very low incident of any perceived bullying amongst the pupils, therefore it was not possible to link Mental Toughness to the perceived occurrence of bullying
- However, in those few who did report bullying, those with lower Mental Toughness reported this as being much more severe. This confirms the finding of a major study at Hull University which showed the same pattern of results in the workplace
- The likely explanation is that mentally tough people shrug off other people's behaviour or actions and don't feel bullied or threatened by it
- Mentally sensitive people on the other hand (mental sensitivity is the opposite of mental toughness) appear to respond negatively to any level of provocative or challenging behaviour from other people and will feel intimidated by it

Summary

The results show that mental toughness is a valuable concept in understanding how young people perform and how they behave in education. Moreover, we know that we can develop mental toughness with most people. Mental toughness could have a key role to play in developing people at all levels.

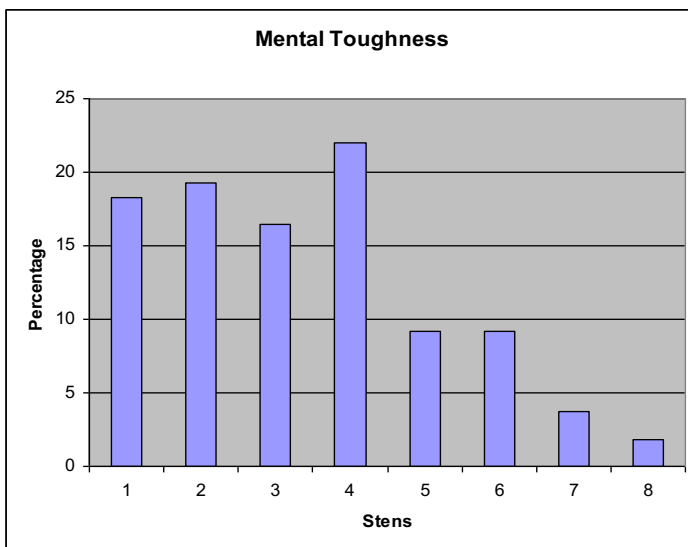


Figure 1 – Overall Mental Toughness

Over 75% of pupils assessed have an overall Mental Toughness of Sten 4 and below.

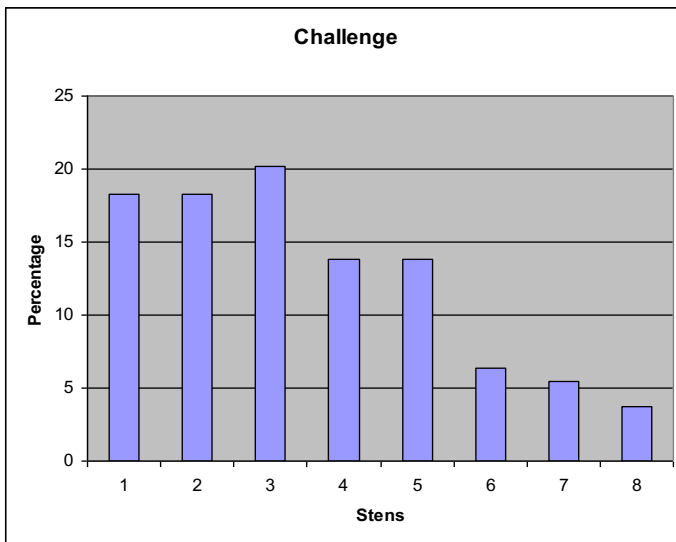


Figure 2 - Challenge

Over 70% of pupils have a Challenge score of sten 4 and below – this suggests a large proportion of pupils are hesitant about change and new challenges.



Figure 3 - Commitment

Over 68% of pupils have a Commitment score of sten 4 and below – this suggests a large proportion of pupils feel threatened when given challenging goals and strict deadlines.

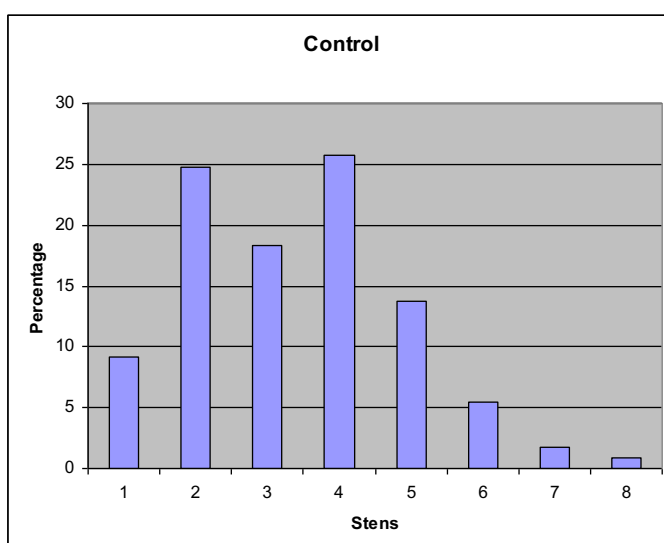


Figure 4. Control

78% of pupils have a Control score of sten 4 and below – this suggests a high percentage of pupils believe they have little influence over their lives and often feel like they are just 'going through the motions'.

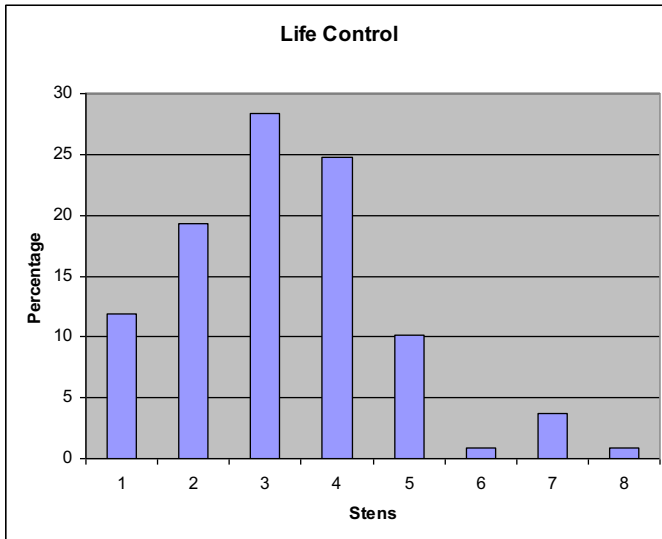


Figure 5. Life Control

Life Control is a particular issue, with over 84% of pupils scoring sten 4 and below. This suggests many individuals who are likely to demonstrate:

- Low self-worth – a belief that they have little influence on what happens
- Low belief that what they do makes a difference
- ‘Learned helplessness’
- A tendency to “do as they are told”

Indicating aspects for “hot house” education. Individuals may have low satisfaction and feel unable to cope with the demands placed on them.

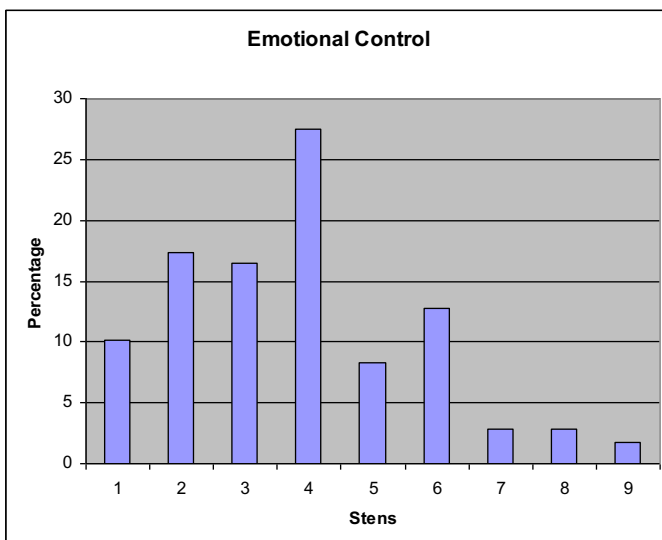


Figure 6. Emotional Control

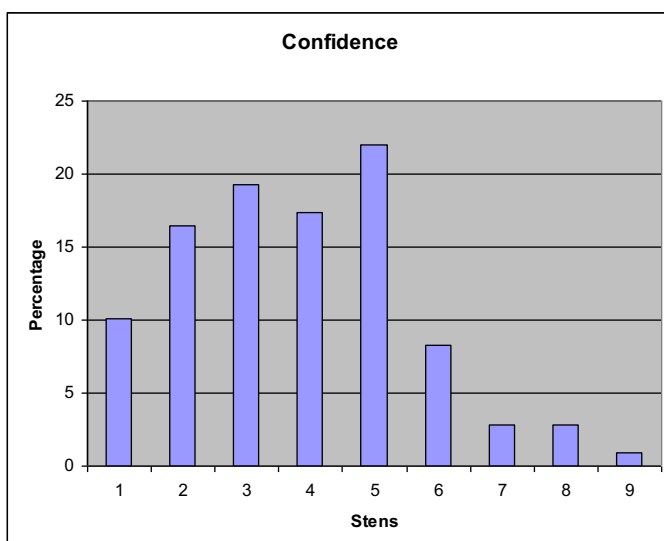


Figure 7 - Confidence

Over 63% of pupils have confidence scores of sten 4 and below – this is suggestive of difficulties in recovering from setbacks.

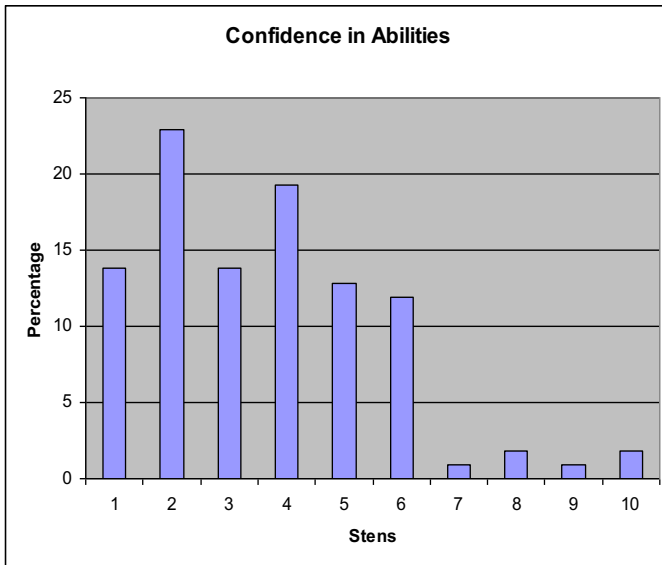


Figure 8. Confidence in Abilities

Confidence in Abilities is a particular issue, with about 70% of pupils scoring sten 4 and below. This suggests many pupils:

- Focus more on the negatives rather than what they can do well
- Find it difficult to recover from setbacks and disappointments
- By focusing on things they might not do so well, they increase the likelihood of setbacks and disappointments
- Tutors had not recognised that pattern because they had interpreted good exam results as evidence of confidence – which was not the case

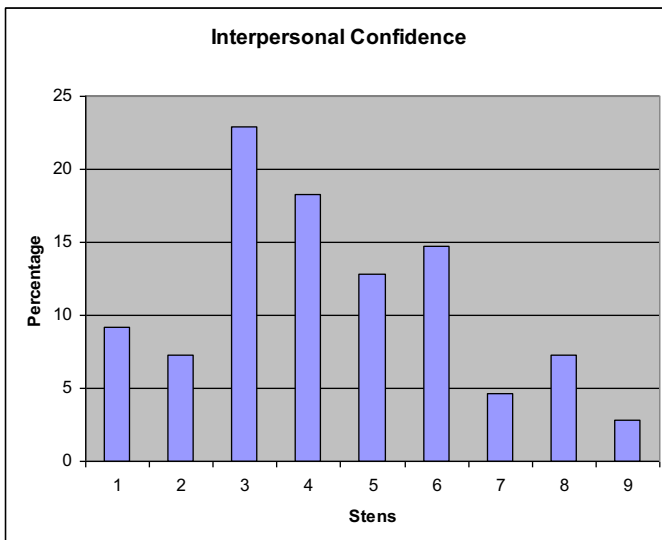


Figure 9. Interpersonal Confidence