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RESEARCH ARTICLE

IMPACT OF EXAMINATION ANXIETY ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF ADOLESCENT

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ABSTRACT

Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the problems associated with academic stress as transitions occur at an individual and social level. It therefore, becomes imperative to understand the sources and impact of academic stress in order to derive adequate and efficient intervention strategies. Academic anxiety has become part of students' academic life due to the various internal and external expectations placed upon their shoulders. The study employed a quantitative research design where participants were screened using examination stress level from adolescent boys and girls of government and private schools. Understanding the sources of stress would facilitate the development of effective counselling modules and yoga strategies by school psychologists and counsellors in order to help students alleviate to examination anxiety.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence, aptly described as "The Wonder Years," is a time of extraordinary growth and change for young people. Parents wonder if they will survive their child's journey through puberty, middle grades teachers wonder how to keep their students focused on learning, and young adolescents themselves wonder if they are normal. Adolescence is often described as a phase of life that begins in biology and ends in society (1). It means that physical and biological changes are universal and take place due to maturation but the psychosocial and behavioral manifestations are determined by the meaning given to these changes within a cultural system. The experience of adolescents during teen years would vary considerably according to the cultural and social values of the network of social identities they grow in (2). Adolescence within all of these perspectives is viewed as a transitional period between childhood and adulthood, whose cultural purpose is the preparation of children for adult roles. It is a period of multiple transitions involving education, training, employment and unemployment, as well as transitions from one living circumstance to another.

Adolescent's educators hence not only must address these developmental changes, they also must deal with the varying rate at which students undergo the changes such as physical, emotional, and social development (3). It is easy to forget the intellectual development differences since they are not readily visible, but if one observes, he will soon become aware of these differences, too. For example, adolescents are moving from concrete thinking to abstract thinking, but this transition is occurring at varying rates for different children, and individual students move back and forth from concrete to abstract continually or function differently in different classes. Students are beginning to think about thinking, and this sometimes confuses them. Teachers of adolescents need to be knowledgeable of the varied developmental characteristics so that they can design instruction and classroom management strategies that address these ongoing changes, and support and capitalize on these characteristics (4). Adolescents during this critical period if hold unmet needs, may have serious consequences not for the individual alone but for the family, community, society and Nation at large. Examination anxiety is a feeling which comes with being afraid of failing during an exam or evaluation. Examination anxiety hinders students' perception and success and can impede their exam preparation and exam taking.

Students become afraid of making mistakes and the situation of having to sit an exam become wrought with terror (5). Examination anxiety can be evident in both the thinking and behaviour of students. Examination anxiety is actually a type of performance anxiety, a feeling someone might have in a situation where performance really counts or when the pressure on to do well. For example, a person might experience performance anxiety when he or she is about to try out for the school play, sing a solo on stage, or go into an important interview (6). Examinations are a part of every curricular activity. These are often tiresome and extremely stressful for students at any level of education. Stressful feelings can alter the ability to think during examination. The sensation of having over-whelming nervousness can cause panic thoughts to the mind. This panic state causes the students to lose their ability to focus in exams. Preoccupation with stressful feelings would reduce the students' thinking and their ability. If the anxiety is occurring when preparing for an exam or while taking a test it is termed as examination anxiety, anticipatory anxiety, situational anxiety and also as evaluation anxiety (7). In reality some anxiety is normal and often helpful keeping you mentally and physically alert. But when one experiences too much anxiety it can result in emotional and/or physical distress, difficulty concentrating and emotional upset.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The main objective of the study was to find exam anxiety among adolescent boys and girls. Further, this study was also conducted to understand if there were gender and school wise differences in academic performance reported by the participants. Differences in gender and school wise were also noted for assessing the exam anxiety scale (8). It was also hypothesized that the sources of exam anxiety will also significantly vary among gender, government and private school wise. Participants for the study were selected from a general pool of students using random sampling technique.

Statistical analysis: Experiments were performed in triplicates and represented as mean \pm SD. Statistical analysis of the data was done using Graph Pad Prism (version 5) software. Dunnett's compare test was applied with 95% confidence with difference considered as significant at $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

The main objectives of the study were to understand the level of exam anxiety on academic performance. Gender and school wise differences in total exam anxiety were also analysed. Data was collected from government and private schools. The students who responded to the questionnaire were currently in their final exam. The obtained data was subjected to appropriate statistical analysis and the results are discussed in this session. The total number of participants (boys and girls) who were subjected to the analysis procedures were 110. The mean of the participants for exam anxiety was 55 as reflected in table 1. Using the mean as cut-off for preliminary analysis and interpretation, it was found that 14.5% of boys and 20% of girl students fall under the category of having extremely high stress levels at the time of exam. The second major objective was to find if there are any significant gender differences in the total academic score obtained by the participants. The total number of boys and girls were 55 and 55 with a mean score of 28 ± 16.0 and 28 ± 16.0 respectively.

Table 1. Showing mean and standard deviation of adolescent boys and girls for examination anxiety level

Gender	N	Mean	SD
Male	55	28.0	16.0
Female	55	28.0	16.0
Total	110	55.0	31.8

Table 2. Distribution of adolescent boys and girls according to the level of examination anxiety level

Level of exam anxiety	Boys	%
Extremely high	08 ^{ns}	14.5
Moderately high	18 ^{**}	32.7
High	13 ^{ns}	23.6
Low	09 ^{ns}	16.3
Normal	07 ^{ns}	12.7
Level of exam anxiety	Girls	%
Extremely high	11 ^{ns}	20
Moderately high	14 ^{ns}	25.4
High	11 ^{ns}	20
Low	09 ^{ns}	16.3
Normal	10	18.1

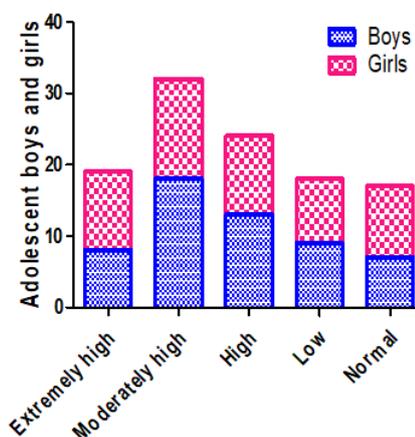


Figure 1. Comparison of mean of adolescent level of examination anxiety in experimental group

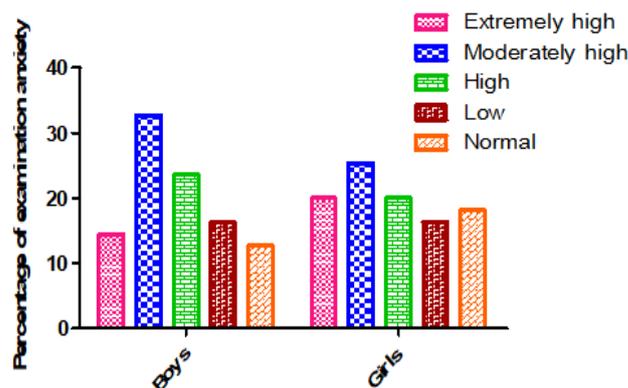


Figure 2. Comparison of percentage of adolescent level of examination anxiety in experimental group

Table 2 depicts exam anxiety level of adolescents in experimental group. Among experimental group, majority 18 boys (32.7%) of the adolescents and 14 girls (25.4%) had experienced moderately high exam anxiety (Figure 1). High level of anxiety in adolescent boys and girls was observed 23.6% and 20% in comparison to normal adolescent boys (12.7%) and girls (18.1%) (Figure 2).

DISCUSSION

The anxiety and stress associated with achievement failure, lack of confidence etc are likely to lead to depression, anger, violence and other mental health problems in adolescence. Anxiety is a natural and important emotion, signalling through stirrings of worry, fearfulness, and alarm that danger or a sudden threatening change is near (9). Yet sometimes anxiety becomes an exaggerated and unhealthy response. Anxiety causes the physical effects like heart palpitations, muscle weakness and tension, fatigue, nausea, chest pain, shortness of breath, stomach ache or headaches. The external signs of anxiety are pale skin, sweating, trembling, and 3 pupillary dilatation (10,11). Anxiety is an emotional and/or physiological response to known and/or unknown causes that may range from a normal reaction to extreme dysfunction (indicative of an anxiety disorder), affect decision-making and adherence to treatment, and impair functioning and/or affect quality of life. The set of phenomenological, physiological, and behavioral responses accompany concern about possible negative consequences or failure on an exam or similar evaluative situation (12-14). One among such type of behavioural response is the examination anxiety.

Sibnath Deb and Kerryann Walsh (2010) conducted a study to understand better anxiety among adolescents in Kolkata city, India. A group of 460 adolescents (220 boys and 240 girls), aged 13-17 years were recruited to participate in the study via a multi-stage sampling technique. The data were collected using a self-report semi-structured questionnaire and a standardized psychological test, the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory. Results show that anxiety was prevalent in the sample with 20.1% of boys and 17.9% of girls found to be suffering from high anxiety. More boys were anxious than girls. The majority of adolescents report being more stressed by tests and by schoolwork than by anything else in their lives. About 16-20% of adolescents have high test anxiety, making this the most prevalent scholastic impairment in our schools today. Another 18% are troubled by moderately-high test anxiety. Survey of 2011 post "A" level students recorded 69% experienced stress related problems in months preceding exam and during exam. These included Poor concentration, Persistent worries, Panic reactions, certain minor health problems. A study was done to assess the (a) relationship of test anxiety to academic performance among college students (b) difference in study related behaviour between high and low test anxious students and (c) differential effectiveness of study related behaviour for both groups. The subjects were 65 high and 31 low test 13 anxious students of first semester freshman (16-18). The grade point average for low test anxious students were 2.86 in contrast with 2.51 for the high test anxious group test was used for analysis. Results demonstrated a significant decrement in grade point average associated with test anxiety.

CONCLUSION

Examination anxiety has become a pervasive problem across countries, cultures, and ethnic groups. The present study brought into light that examination anxiety still continues to be a devastating problem affecting a student's mental health and well-being. Gender wise differences in the experience of anxiety were also highlighted. Management of the condition thus becomes fundamental at every level namely, personal, social and institutional. Techniques like biofeedback, yoga,

life-skills training, mindfulness meditation, psychotherapy have been found to be effective in reducing stress among students. Understanding the source from the different spheres will enable professionals in the field to tailor-make counselling for students combining the most effective strategies. Improving the holistic well-being of the student would eventually be productive not only the individual but, for the overall productivity of the institutions as well.

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