

Is Academic Anxiety Gender Specific: A Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT A comparative study between boys and girls of 16-18 years was conducted to know the academic anxiety prevailing amongst them. The objective of the study was to find out the gender differences in incidences and intensity of Academic Anxiety amongst adolescents. Incidental purposive sampling technique was used in the selection of the sample. A total sample of 240 adolescent, 120 boys and 120 girls from different high schools of Jodhpur city were selected. Self-constructed Adolescent Problem Inventory was pilot tested and applied on the chosen sample. The obtained results were statistically analyzed. The Results revealed that considerable amount of Academic Anxiety prevailed amongst the sample. It was seen that girls on the whole had more incidences and intensity of academic anxiety in comparison to boys.

INTRODUCTION

Anxiety amongst adolescent boys and girls is very common and natural. Be it about self, career, academics or any other issue, the youths undergo feelings of anxiety at some phase of their lives. Freud (cf. Baldwin, 1967) described adolescence as a period of sexual excitement, anxiety and sometimes of personality disturbance. Anna Freud characterizes adolescence as a period of internal conflict, psychic disequilibrium and erratic behaviour. Adolescents are on one hand egoistic regarding themselves as the sole object of interest and the center of the universe but on the other hand also capable of self sacrifice and devotion. Youth today are living in an increasingly anxiety ridden atmosphere (Nalini, 1997). They live in a world where nothing seems to be guaranteed with certainty and at the same time they are expected to perform at every front, the main being the academics. Adolescents often lack in academic motivation and performance, as their attention is divided among a lot many things especially at creating an identity for themselves. Once out of elementary school, they find their teachers, parents, and peers putting a new emphasis on deadlines, academics and mastery of large amounts of information. Reddy (1989) conducted research to find out the adjustment and problem areas of many adolescents in the school and the results showed that most of the problems concentrated on academic anxiety followed by anxiety regarding their future. Verma and Gupta (1990) explored the causes of basic academic pressure burdening the school going

adolescents. Results revealed that academic stress was caused due to examination system, burden of homework and attitudes of parents and teachers.

This is a generation where everybody lives, breathes and eats competition. The all-pervasive competitive atmosphere, it social or academic, encourages adolescents to constantly compare themselves with their peers. Consequently their self-image is in a continual state of redefinition. Stress is partly created by parental pressure too when they expect the adolescents to perform and stand out among their peer groups. When they can't rise up to that expectation or are in process of meeting it, adolescents suffer from frustration, physical stress, aggression, undesirable complexes and depression. Even in a recent research 40% of the students surveyed in Delhi felt that they are overwhelmed by examinations and want guidance. Those aspiring to get into professional college prepare for over a dozen entrance examinations apart from tuitions in the major subjects.

Gender differences are observed amongst adolescents as far as academic anxiety is concerned. Boys are said to have more academic anxiety as compared to girls. Traditionally it is the males who are supposed to be primary breadwinners and so boys are more concerned about doing well in academics to ensure better jobs. Also masculine self esteem is dependent on their ability to earn and provide for. Adolescent boys, who are establishing their identity and have reason to be worried about academics which is almost a ticket to their job aspirations. With

reference to Indian culture Pramod (1996) concluded that boys manifest more future orientations than girls, therefore boys have more academic anxiety. Even a study conducted by Ojha (2005) revealed that 25% boys have extremely high anxiety whereas only 6.7% girls have high academic anxiety.

The present paper is an attempt to explore whether academic anxiety in adolescents is gender specific. As such the objectives of study are:

Objectives

To find out the incidences and intensity of Academic anxiety amongst adolescents.

To find out if there are gender difference in incidences and intensity of Academic anxiety amongst adolescents.

Hypotheses

Adolescents will have academic anxiety

Adolescent boys will have more academic anxiety than girls

METHODOLOGY

Incidental purposive sampling technique was used in the selection of sample for the present study. A total sample of 240 adolescents, 120 girls and 120 boys from different High schools of Jodhpur city were selected.

All the selected schools had English as medium of instructions. They were private institutions; half of which were single sex and the others were co-educational schools.

The age range of the subjects was 16-18 years.

Tools

Background Information Performa: A self constructed Performa was used to elicit the information regarding the personal and family background of adolescents.

Self-Constructed Adolescent Problem Inventory (API): The checklist consists of Emotional Problems faced by adolescents and rates the Ss on a 3 point scale. The inventory is divided into four sections, namely Depression, Looks consciousness, Anorexia Nervosa and Academic Anxiety. Section 'D' deals with Academic Anxiety hence scores of only Section 'D' were used for present Analysis.

RESULTS

Table 1 depicts that all adolescents had some amount of Academic anxiety, 35.4% had low level of Academic anxiety, 41.3 had border line and as high as 23.3% Ss had high academic anxiety. However when split on gender it was observed that girls (66.1%) as compared to boys (33.9%) were high on this problem.

Table 1: Percentage of academic anxiety of total sample (n = 240) and split on gender.

Problem Academic Anxiety	Frequency	%	Split on Gender	
			Boys	Girls
Low	85	35.4	57.6	42.4
Border Line	99	41.3	52.5	47.5
High	56	23.3	33.9	66.1

Table 2 provides mean, S.D. and 't' scores of adolescents on Academic Anxiety. The significance of difference between the genders is at considerable high level on Academic Anxiety ($p < 0.01$ level) where girls are having more academic anxiety than boys (Fig.1).

Table 2: Mean, S.D. and 't' scores of academic anxiety faced by adolescent boys and girls.

Gender	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
<i>Academic Anxiety</i>					
Boys	1.75	0.71	-2.672	238	0.008**
Girls	2.01	0.78			

** $p < .01$

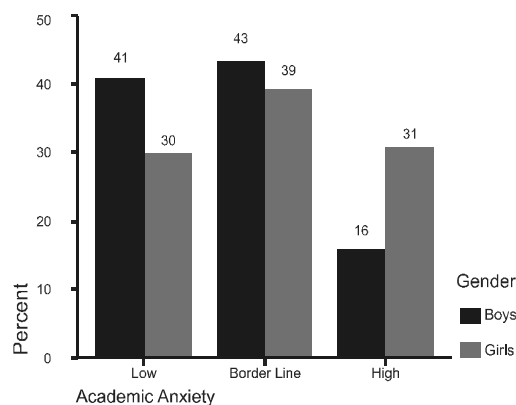


Fig. 1. Categories of academic anxiety on gender.

DISCUSSION

Academics are the major source of tension amongst the youth nowadays. In today's competitive world, it is not uncommon to find academic achievement playing the most important role in a child's growing up. Being academically successful and making a place for oneself in the society is their priority. It is also true that youth today, often lacks academic motivation as their attention is diverted and divided among many things like peer group, heterogeneous relations, fashion and incessant entertainment. It appears that desiring and requiring academic achievement on one hand, and getting diverted from thorough academic efforts, creates a situation of continuous stress and anxiety for the adolescents. The present research too, reported all pervasive academic anxiety amongst adolescents, thus confirming hypothesis 1. Adolescence is a connecting stage between childhood fantasies and practical adult world, and according to Erickson the central issue and occupation during this stage is establishing one's identity. For today's adolescent self identity includes one's academic identity too.

During adolescence gender also comes up as an important factor in the intensity and types of emotional problems faced. Even in the present study significant gender difference are observed. Pramod (1996) concluded, with reference to Indian culture, that boys manifested more futuristic orientation than girls and therefore boys have more academic anxiety than girls. Contradictory results are also reported in a study by Trivedi & Ojha (2005), where they found that boys had higher academic anxiety as compared to girls. But in the Present research it is revealed (table I& II) that girls suffer significantly more with Academic Anxiety than boys. This however,

out rightly rejected hypothesis 2 which stated that Adolescent boys will have more academic anxiety than girls. Same Gender differences in favour of boys have been reported by Sharma (1994). She too has observed girls showing more academic anxiety than boys. Right from early childhood differential environment provided to girls and boys reflects in their personality. Boys in general have better self – esteem and tension areas for them are restricted to academics and future, as till date, boys are expected to be the primary breadwinners. The sources of tension for girls are more than boys. Girls are more prone to depression, be it their looks, marriage or the self – esteem. But today's girls are getting involved in the frenzy of competitions and career worries too. As a result even for girls, the emerging source of depression is the increasing dreams and aspirations regarding their independence and career along with the usual concerns regarding looks, mate selection and marriage. All these make them more vulnerable to emotional pressures and problems one of which is found to be the high academic anxiety.

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