

Age and gender differences in rural adolescents with respect to parental encouragement, academic performance and academic anxiety

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ABSTRACT

In the present study, an attempt has been made to study the age and gender differences in parental encouragement, academic performance and academic anxiety among rural adolescents. A total sample of 200 (100 boys and 100 girls) adolescents in the age range of 13-16 years, from different high and senior secondary schools of Ludhiana district were purposely selected. Socio-economic status scale was used to judge the socio-economic status of the respondents. To measure the level of perceived parental encouragement and academic anxiety by the adolescents, the Agarwal Parental Encouragement Scale and Academic Anxiety Scale for Children were used. The results revealed that academic performance and age were significantly associated with parental encouragement and academic anxiety. Non-significant age and gender differences for parental encouragement and academic anxiety were found.

KEY WORDS : Parental encouragement, Academic performance, Academic anxiety, Rural adolescents

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INTRODUCTION

Modern age is often called the age of stress and strain. Stress and anxiety are commonly seen on the faces of people in their taut nerves and in their behaviour and actions. The demands of life are so pressing that hardly few can escape the trap of stress. Anxiety is harmful only when it exceeds the limit. Today, anxiety is not only troubling adults but has also started taking adolescents and children in its claws. Their heavy school bags, neck to neck competition, parental aspirations and pressures are proofs of their stressful life. 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 beings the academics. The reason behind academic anxiety is that the adolescents manifest more future orientations, career consciousness and therefore undergo feelings of anxiety at some phase of their lives. Another reason can be the pressure that parents impose on adolescents for performing academically well. 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. Although a certain amount of anxiety is necessary to get motivated and excel for an individual, but it becomes harmful when one begins to over react the situation. In our society, academic achievement is considered as key criteria to judge one's total potentialities and capabilities. Therefore, it is becoming more and more pressing for the individuals to have good academic achievement.

Hence, children perceive examination and results to be an indicator of their worth. As adolescence is a passing phase, it should be tackled by the parents and teachers sympathetically and sensibly. Parents have an important role to play because it is believed that parents care, concern, guidance and influence or a word, "Parental encouragement" has an effect on the educational development of the child. It is well documented that parental involvement and parenting have a variety of intellectual, academic and social outcomes. There are strong reasons for understanding the way adolescents perceive parental encouragement and how it relates to their academic achievement. Therefore the present study

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has been planned to study the age and gender differences in parental encouragement, academic performance and academic anxiety among rural adolescents.

METHODOLOGY

A total of 200 students (100 boys and 100 girls) belonging to Punjabi origin, nuclear and middle socio-economic status families from different Government High and Senior Secondary schools of Ludhiana district were purposely selected. A list of adolescents (both boys and girls) in the age range of 13-16 years (were further divided in two age groups *i.e.* 12.5-14.5 years and 14.5-16.5 years) along with their marks obtained in previous examination was prepared from the school records. They were then divided into two groups of high performers (>70% marks) and low performers (<45% marks). The socio economic status scale developed by Bhardwaj (2001) was used to judge the socio-economic status of the respondents and Agarwal parental encouragement scale developed by Agarwal (1999) was used to measure quantitatively the parental encouragement as perceived by the adolescents. The academic anxiety scale for children constructed by Singh and Gupta (1984) was used to assess the academic anxiety of school going adolescents.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 elucidates the age differences among the adolescents across various levels of parental encouragement. The results reveal that the mean score of adolescents in the age group of 14.5-16.5 years perceiving low and high parental encouragement was

found to be higher than their counterparts in the age group of 12.5-14.5 years. Except in case of average parental encouragement, where adolescents who were in the age group of 12.5-14.5 years of age had higher mean score (330.32) The t value for all the three levels of parental encouragement were found to be non-significant *i.e.* 0.89, 0.75 and 0.4. Non-significant age differences were also found for total parental encouragement ($t=0.001$). This shows that parental encouragement for both the age groups was the same. Because of the changing scenario, now a day, parents provide similar facilities, opportunities and emotional inputs to their children irrespective of their age. In the case of the present study it was found that both the age groups were receiving same amount of parental encouragement. A study conducted by Ziegler (1987) has shown that parental involvement in younger and older children was equally important.

Table 2 illustrates age wise differences of adolescents across various levels of academic anxiety. It was found that the mean score of less anxious adolescents who were in the age group of 14.5-16.5 years were comparatively higher (8.2) than the mean score (7.53) of adolescents in the age group of 12.5-14.5 years. Similarly, in case of high level of academic anxiety, the mean score of the adolescents who were in the age group of 14.5-16.5 years was comparatively higher (17.02) than their counterparts (16.83). The table further depicts close difference between the mean scores of both the age groups having average level of academic anxiety *i.e.* 12.68 for the 12.5-14.5 years of age group and 12.22 for the 14.5-16.5 years of age group. Non-significant differences were observed in all the three levels of academic anxiety *i.e.* low anxiety

Table 1 : Age differences among adolescents across various levels of parental encouragement (N=200)

Levels of parental encouragement	Age				t-value
	12.5-14.5 years (n=100)		14.5-16.5 years (n=100)		
	Mean	S.D. (\pm)	Mean	S.D. (\pm)	
Low	269.15	12.41	270	10.27	0.89 ^{NS}
Average	330.32	17.7	328.5	19.2	0.75 ^{NS}
High	365.79	9.05	367.38	12.08	0.4 ^{NS}
Total	338.66	39.57	354.74	28.41	0.001 ^{NS}

NS = Non-significant

Table 2 : Age differences among adolescents across various levels of academic anxiety (N=200)

Levels of academic anxiety	Age				t value
	12.5-14.5 years (n=100)		14.5-16.5 years (n=100)		
	Mean	S.D. (\pm)	Mean	S.D. (\pm)	
Low	7.53	1.59	8.2	1.30	0.41 ^{NS}
Average	12.68	1.28	12.22	1.16	0.25 ^{NS}
High	16.83	0.97	17.02	1.11	0.26 ^{NS}
Total	14.52	3.58	15.72	2.77	0.008 ^{NS}

NS = Non-significant

($t=0.41$), average anxiety ($t=0.25$) and high anxiety ($t=0.26$). A look at the mean scores of all the levels of academic anxiety clearly shows that the adolescents of higher age group had more of low and high academic anxiety except for average level of anxiety where the lower age group adolescents had more than their counterparts. It means that anxiety among adolescents is very common and natural. Be it about self, career, academics or any other issue, the adolescents undergo feelings of anxiety. Adolescents today are living in an increasingly anxiety ridden atmosphere and expected to perform at every front main being the academics. The results with regard to educational achievement are also in line with those obtained from other studies by Lashkaripour (2006) and Mwamwenda (1994). All have reached the conclusion that educational achievement and test anxiety level have a reverse ratio. It means that as test anxiety level increases, educational achievement decreases and *vice-versa*.

Table 3 elucidates the association between age and various levels of parental encouragement among adolescents. The two age groups considered were 12.5-14.5 years and 14.5-16.5 years. It was found that there were 20 per cent of adolescents perceiving low parental encouragement which were in the age group of 12.5-14.5 as compared to 5 per cent of adolescents who were in the age group of 14.5-16.5 years. Similarly in the case of average level of parental encouragement it was found that the number of adolescents in the age group of 12.5-14.5 years was 22 per cent and in the age group of 14.5-16.5 years was 20 per cent. It was further found that majority of the adolescents in both the age groups *i.e.* 58 per cent in the age group of 12.5-14.5 years and 75 per cent in the age group of 14.5-16.5 years perceived high level of parental encouragement. A significant ($\chi^2 = 11.268$, $p < 0.01$) association was found between age and various levels of parental encouragement among rural adolescents. This shows that parental encouragement and age both are related to each other. Maximum number of adolescents perceived high parental encouragement. Perceived parental

Table 3 : Association between age and parental encouragement among adolescents (N=200)

Levels of parental encouragement	Age		Total
	12.5-14.5 years	14.5-16.5 years	
Low	20 (20.00)	5 (5.00)	25
Average	22 (22.00)	20 (20.00)	42
High	58 (58.00)	75 (75.00)	133
Total	100	100	200

$\chi^2 = 11.268^{**}$

Figures in parentheses indicate percentage

** indicates significance of value at $P=0.01$

encouragement level increases with increase in age. Walberg (1984) found that family correlates of positive academic achievement for elementary and secondary level students include: (a) parental interest in children's academic and personal growth, strong parental encouragement of academic pursuits, (b) fostering children's interest and skill in reading and math's, (c) orienting a student's attention to learning opportunities, and (d) recognizing and encouraging the child's special talents. On the contrary, results of the study by Epstein, (1987) reported that parental involvement appears to be correlated with age of the child. Similarly, Lucas and Lusthaus (1978) reported that in middle and high schools (age 13-18 years) parental involvement declines. This may be due to the adolescent's push for autonomy.

Table 4 depicts the association between age and various levels of academic anxiety among adolescents. Results revealed that 15 per cent of adolescents in the age group of 12.5-14.5 years and 5 per cent in the age group of 14.5-16.5 years were experienced low levels of academic anxiety. Further, it was found that 22 per cent of adolescents, who were subjected to average level of anxiety, were in the age group of 12.5-14.5 years and a comparatively less per cent of adolescents *i.e.* (18%) were in the age group of 14.5-16.5 years. It was further found that majority of the adolescents in both the age groups *i.e.* 63 per cent in the age group of 12.5-14.5 years and 77 per cent in the age group of 14.5-16.5 years perceived high level of academic anxiety. Table 4 clearly depicts that academic anxiety increases with increase in age. Academics are the major source of anxiety among adolescents because they manifest more future orientations. A significant ($\chi^2 = 6.8$, $p < 0.05$) association was found between age and various levels of academic anxiety of rural adolescents. It is clear from the result that age affects the academic anxiety, as the adolescents

Table 4 : Association between age and academic anxiety among adolescents (N=200)

Levels of academic anxiety	Age		Total
	12.5-14.5 years	14.5-16.5 years	
Low	15 (15.00)	5 (5.00)	20
Average	22 (22.00)	18 (18.00)	40
High	63 (63.00)	77 (77.00)	140
Total	100	100	200

$\chi^2 = 6.8^*$

Figures in parentheses indicate percentage

* indicates significance of value at $P=0.05$

Table 5 : Overall gender differences with respect to parental encouragement, academic performance and academic anxiety among adolescents (N=200)

	Boys (n = 100)		Girls (n = 100)		t value
	Mean	S.D. (±)	Mean	S.D. (±)	
Parental encouragement	338.58	34.74	347.94	25.96	0.03 ^{NS}
Academic performance	55.004	18.29	54.97	19.49	0.99 ^{NS}
Academic anxiety	13.51	3.03	14.31	2.70	0.05 ^{NS}

NS = Non-significant

in both the age groups are facing high level of academic anxiety. But on a contrary, it was found that older children were less anxious about their school work overall and procrastinated more than younger on homework (Milgram and Toubiana, 1999).

Table 5 depicts overall gender differences among adolescents with respect to parental encouragement, academic performance and academic anxiety. The results show that in case of perceived parental encouragement and academic anxiety, the mean scores of girls (347.94 and 14.31 respectively) were higher than that of boys (338.58 and 13.51). Although no significant gender differences were found. While in case of academic performance, the mean scores of boys (55.004) were more than the mean scores of girls *i.e.* 54.97. The calculated 't' value for parental encouragement, academic anxiety and academic performance was 0.03, 0.99 and 0.05 respectively which was found to be non-significant at 5% level of significance.

Results show no significant differences between boys and girls with respect to parental encouragement, academic performance and academic anxiety. The results of the present study are in line with the results of Ogunkola (2008) who reported in his study that there was no significant difference in level of parental involvement in male and female children academic activities. Also Sarladevi and Devraj (2001) examined that girls were having more of examination stress and anxiety as compared to boys.

Conclusion:

After the analysis of the entire data and their findings and discussions, non-significant age differences were found between different levels of parental encouragement. Parents, irrespective of their child's age, were providing the same amount of encouragement. Significant association of age with perceived parental encouragement and academic anxiety among adolescents were also observed. It means that perceived parental encouragement and academic anxiety increases with increase in age. Further, non-significant differences were observed among all the three levels of academic anxiety. It is clear from the results

that academic anxiety affects the age. It was observed that both the age groups suffer high level of academic anxiety. Overall gender differences among rural adolescents showed non-significant differences. Non-significant gender differences were also found with respect to parental encouragement, academic performance and academic anxiety in two age groups. It means that parental encouragement, academic performance and academic anxiety were same for both the genders in both the age groups.

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