

Study of academic anxiety among rural and urban adolescent girls

■ DEEPIKA VIG AND ASHA CHAWLA

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See end of the paper for authors' affiliations

Correspondence to :

DEEPIKA VIG

Department of Human Development, College of Home Science, Punjab Agricultural University, LUDHIANA (PUNJAB) INDIA

■ **ABSTRACT** : Present study was an attempt to assess the prevailing academic anxiety among rural and urban adolescent girls of Ludhiana district. Many studies have reported that girls show greater academic anxiety than boys and the levels of anxiety also differ in rural and urban settings. Keeping this in view the present research was carried out in rural and urban senior secondary schools of Ludhiana district. A total sample consisted of 100 adolescent girls in the age group of 15-16 years, evenly distributed over rural and urban areas (50 rural and 50 urban). The results of the present study revealed that majority of rural and urban girls had moderate level of academic anxiety. The mean scores indicated that rural girls experienced significantly higher levels of academic anxiety as compared to their counterparts. The results emphasise the need to provide better educational facilities in rural areas and to teach adolescent girls strategies for effective management of their anxiety.

■ **KEY WORDS** : Academic anxiety, Adolescent girls, Rural, Urban

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Academic achievement is important to assess the progress made by the individual in the whole educational process. The term achievement refers to the degree or level of success attained in some specific tasks, especially school performance. Hence, according to Krishnamurthy (2003) academic achievement bears the meaning “the attained ability to perform school tasks, which can be general or specific to a given subject matter”. Academic or scholastic achievement is a complex phenomenon and requires different approaches to understanding and interpretation. Choudhary (2004) defined scholastic achievement as knowledge acquired and skills developed in school subjects, generally indicated by marks obtained in tests in an annual examination.

Anxiety is our body's way of telling us that there is something in the environment in need of attention. It is basically a series of biochemical changes in our brain and body that result in a state of heightened attention to the source of the anxiety. Anxiety is not a bad thing. It is true that a high level of anxiety interferes with concentration and memory, which are critical for academic success. Without any anxiety, however, most of us would lack the motivation to study for exams. A moderate amount of anxiety actually helps academic

performance by creating motivation. The influence of anxiety on academic achievement has been well documented by a number of investigators (Defrenbacher, 1980; Sarason 1986; Sarason and Sarason, 1990). Importantly, school avoidance, decreased problem solving abilities and lower academic achievement have also been noted as consequences of anxiety (Donovan and Spence, 2000; Mc Loone *et al.*, 2006).

Anxiety has adverse influence on academic performance of school children. Angela *et al.* (2010) while studying anxiety disorder amongst secondary school children mentioned that anxiety contributes significantly to poor academic performance.

While exploring gender differences in academic anxiety, Sahukar (2011) reported that academic anxiety plays an important role at secondary level of education because this is the threshold of future education. Girls particularly are highly tensed at this stage because on one hand they want to secure good percentage for getting admission for their future education and on the other hand, they also want to prove themselves better than boys in this highly competitive age.

In India, the main documented cause of anxiety among adolescents is parents' high educational expectations and pressure for academic achievement (Deb,2001). Generally, more

girls than boys develop anxiety disorders and symptoms. It has been observed that adolescent girls report a greater number of worries, more separation anxiety and higher level of generalized anxiety (Campbell and Rapee, 1994; Costello *et al.*, 2003; Weiss and Last, 2001).

Remadevi (1995) found a significant difference between the anxiety of urban and rural pupils. Judd *et al.* (2002) reported that urban areas have been portrayed as environments of change and interpersonal estrangement are seen as a focus of technological development and social dislocation. Rural areas have been depicted as environments of social stability, integration, supportive interpersonal networks and consensus about moral and political issues: and in addition, as aesthetically superior to large cities (Webb, 1984 and Crowell *et al.* (1986). But it is imperative to mention that now-a-days rural life has changed substantially over the past few decades. The traditional characteristics of rural life have been affected by a variety of factors including globalization, economic restructuring and economic rationalization (Fincer and Wuff, 1997) movements of younger generation to cities, free-flowing access to information (particularly via internet), more ready access to urban settings through improved transportation and inward migration of people who commute to urban jobs, and relatively high rates of poverty and unemployment. Many of the studies cited by those claiming urban-rural differences were done many years ago.

Recent literature on the multiple roles adopted by working parents is mixed with some studies suggesting that multiple roles increase stress levels and diminish parenting capacity (O'Neil and Greenberger, 1994; Repetti, 1993). Deb *et al.* (2010) studied anxiety among high school students in India and reported adolescents belonging to the middle class (middle socio-economic group) suffered more anxiety than those from both high and low socio-economic groups ($p < 0.01$).

Thus, keeping in view the above factors present study was planned with the following objectives :

-To study the prevalence of academic anxiety among rural and urban adolescent girls and to assess differences

between anxiety levels of rural and urban adolescent girls.

Sample :

The present study was carried out in rural and urban senior secondary schools of Ludhiana district. A total sample consisted of 100 adolescent girls in the age group of 15-16 years, evenly distributed over rural and urban areas.

Research tool :

Academic Anxiety scale by Singh and Gupta (1984) was used to assess the levels of academic anxiety among rural and urban adolescent girls.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 describes the per cent distribution of adolescent girls across various levels of academic anxiety. The data revealed that 22 per cent of the urban girls were having low level of academic anxiety as compared to 14 per cent of the girls from rural schools. Similarly, medium level of anxiety was found in 74 per cent of the urban adolescent girls against 56 per cent of the rural adolescent girls. However, 30 per cent of the rural girls reported high academic anxiety against only 4 per cent of the adolescent girls who belonged to urban schools. The results are in line with the findings of Campbell and Rapee, 1994; Costello *et al.*, 2003; Weiss and Last, 2001 who also reported that more girls than boys develop anxiety disorders and symptoms. Adolescent girls reported a greater number of worries, more separation anxiety and higher level of generalized anxiety.

Table 2 indicates the mean scores of rural and urban adolescent girls across various levels of academic anxiety. It is clear from the table that rural adolescent girls had mean value of 7.86 and urban adolescent girls had little higher mean value of 8.36. However, no significant differences were found between the mean values of the two groups. For medium level of academic anxiety, mean scores of rural and urban adolescent girls were found comparable (12.72 and 12.35, respectively). However, just opposite trend was observed in case of high level of academic anxiety, where rural adolescent girls scored

Levels of anxiety	Rural		Urban	
	frequency	Percentage	frequency	percentage
Low	7	14	11	22
Medium	28	56	37	74
High	15	30	2	4

Levels of anxiety	Rural			Urban			t-value
	Frequency	Mean	S.D.	Frequency	Mean	S.D.	
Low	7	7.86	1.21	11	8.36	0.67	1.15
Medium	28	12.72	1.21	37	12.35	1.18	1.21
High	15	17.47	0.83	2	15.5	0.71	3.16*

* Indicate significance of value at $P=0.05$

significantly higher mean value of 17.47 than mean value (15.5) of urban adolescent girls. The results of the study highlighted the fact that rural adolescent girls were significantly experiencing high levels of academic anxiety as compared to the urban adolescent girls.

The findings are in support of the fact that rural settings are providing greater academic stress to adolescent girls. As mentioned by Fincer and Wuff (1997), the rural life has now a days changed substantially. The traditional characteristics of rural life have been affected by a variety of factors including globalization, economic restructuring and economic rationalization. In rural areas also, now there is free-flowing access to information (particularly via internet), more ready access to urban settings through improved transportation. Many educated rural parents are sending their daughters for studies and they aspire high for their young daughters. But the educational facilities in the form of infrastructure, exposure to teaching institutions, and transportation in rural areas are far below as compared to the facilities present in cities. Due to lack of these facilities, many young girls find it hard to live up to the parents' unreasonably high expectations. Consequently, they are frequently judged negatively by the parent. They in turn, internalize these negative judgements and become anxious when face evaluative situations.

Conclusion :

The results of the study suggested that rural adolescent girls experience greater stress related with academics than urban adolescent girls. Hence, there is need to sensitize these girls on the issues of academic anxiety and educational programmes should be planned to teach management of academic anxiety among adolescents girls.

Authors' affiliations:

ASHA CHAWLA, Department of Human Development, College of Home Science, Punjab Agricultural University, LUDHIANA (PUNJAB) INDIA

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