

# Academic anxiety among urban adolescents: A study of gender differences

■ ASHA CHAWLA AND DEEPIKA VIG

Received: 01.03.2014; Accepted: 09.11.2014

See end of the paper for authors' affiliations

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

■ **ABSTRACT** : Present study was an attempt to investigate the gender differences in academic anxiety of urban adolescents. Gender differences in academic anxiety have been highlighted by many researchers. The total sample for the present study consisted of 100 urban adolescents studying in 10<sup>th</sup> standard in various public schools of Ludhiana city. The study was evenly distributed over two sexes *i.e.* 50 boys and 50 girls. The result of the present study revealed that 42 per cent of the boys and 74 per cent of the girls were found to have medium level of anxiety. Further, it was found that urban girls showed significantly more academic anxiety than urban boys. The result emphasises the need to teach simple strategies to adolescent girls for managing their anxiety effectively. Parent education programme can also be initiated so that parents can guide and provide practical support to girls on issues related to academic performance.

■ **KEY WORDS**: Academic anxiety, Gender difference, Adolescents

■ **HOW TO CITE THIS PAPER** : Chawla, Asha and Vig, Deepika (2014). Academic anxiety among urban adolescents: A study of gender differences. *Asian J. Home Sci.*, 9 (2) : 598-600.

Academic or scholastic achievement has become an index of child's future in this highly competitive world. It is only a drop in the vast sea of education and great many students would appear not to give themselves credit commensurate with their known or rated abilities. Many times students of undoubted average or abilities excel (Katyal and Bindra, 1995). Anxiety may be regarded as a disorder when it occurs in the absence of an appreciable degree or a kind of threat or danger. Anxiety may be a diffuse, free- floating but persistent feeling of unease *i.e.* generalised anxiety or it could be a fear attached only to specific object or situations *i.e.* phobia. It may also occur intermittently in extremely acute form *i.e.* panic attacks. Anxiety may take the form of a state which is temporary feeling of subjective and physical tension or it may be described as a trait in which it takes the form of relatively permanent personality characteristics.

The relationship between anxiety and impaired academic performance have been well documented by a number of investigators (Sharma and Rao, 1984; Sud and Sharma, 1989; Sud, 1994; Sud and Sharma, 1990). Anxiety is a common

symptom found in different population especially among students. Anxiety is a special variety of fear experience in response to an anticipated threat of self-esteem. It is a feeling one gets when faces a real or imagined danger or threat. Psychoanalysts reported that "anxiety is the reaction to the danger of loss of object".

Everyone suffers from anxiety in greater or lesser degree from time to time as a result of specific situations for which anxiety is reasonable response. Anxious children display poorer recall than less anxious children and it is believed that the anxiety creates distracting stimulation that deflects attention from relevant incoming information and therefore impairs memory and intellectual abilities. The degree of anxiety associated with intellectual mastery occurs under two conditions – when expectancy of success or failure is moderate and when motivation is high but expectancy of success is low. In the first instance, the child is maximally uncertain about how he will perform on a test and the uncertainty generates anxiety. The child would be much less anxious if he knew definitely he would pass or fail. In the second instance, the

child values competence on a particular intellectual task but expects to fail. When there is discrepancy between a valued goal and the expectancy of obtaining that goal, anxiety is likely to be generated. Anxiety also occurs due to overpowering nature of the symptoms such as difficulty in making decisions, sleeplessness, loss of appetite, dizziness and nervousness. Other symptoms like exaggerated fear, changed physiological status, impaired communication, decreased orientation, lowered self-esteem, altered socialization, ineffective coping abilities, failure in academic performance are also seen. Factors like difficult family situation, restricted school environment, occupational and financial difficulties without adequate support can also cause anxiety which in turn affects the academic performance of the children in the school. Hence, an imperative need was felt to study the correlates of anxiety and scholastic achievement of residential school students.

Gender differences on anxiety primarily have been studied by self-report measures. Studies by Chatterjee *et al.* (1976), Durette (1965), Sharma and Gandhi (1971) and Nijhawan (1972) reported females to be more anxious than males. The overall picture seems that either females are more anxious or there are no sex differences. Nijhawan (1972) reported that gender differences in general anxiety were more prevalent in the lower social class, less in the upper social class, while no significant differences were found in the middle class. However, regarding test anxiety, gender differences were prevalent in the upper class only.

Lewinsohn *et al.* (1998) conducted a study to find out the gender differences in anxiety disorders and anxiety symptoms in adolescents. The sample consisted of 1079 adolescents. Participants were examined on a wide array of psycho-social measures. Psycho-social variables were correlated with both anxiety and gender. Results showed that female adolescents obtained significantly higher anxiety symptoms score than male adolescents.

Therefore, it could be stated that gender differences do exist as far as academic anxiety is concerned. Thus, keeping

in view the present study was planned with the following objectives :

- To study the prevalence of academic anxiety among urban adolescents.
- To assess the gender differences in anxiety levels of urban adolescents.

## ■ RESEARCH METHODS

### Sample :

The present study was carried out in urban Senior Secondary schools of Ludhiana district. A total sample consisted of 100 adolescent boys and girls in the age group of 15-16 years. The students were personally approached in their respective schools with the permission of Principals.

### Research tool :

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

## ■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 describes the per cent distribution of gender across various levels of academic anxiety. It was found that 42 per cent of boys and 74 per cent of the girls were found to have medium level of anxiety followed by 38 per cent of boys and 22 per cent of girls in low level of academic anxiety. However, against 20 per cent of boys who were found to have high levels of academic anxiety, only 4 per cent of girls were found to have high levels of academic anxiety. Though the distribution of percentage depicted that most of the boys and girls were found to have medium level of anxiety however, the percentage of boys with high academic anxiety was found much higher than the percentage of girls. More proportion of girls was found medium in anxiety however boys were found more at low level of anxiety. Adolescent girls reported a greater number of worries, more separation anxiety and higher level of generalized anxiety.

Levels of anxiety	Boys		Girls	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Low	18	38	11	22
Medium	21	42	37	74
High	10	20	2	4

\* indicate significance of value at P=0.05

Levels of anxiety	Boys		Girls		t-value
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
Low	6.95	0.91	8.36	0.67	4.48*
Medium	9.86	0.79	12.35	1.18	8.60*
High	16.9	1.45	15.5	0.71	2.01

\* indicate significance of value at P=0.05

Table 2 indicates gender differences in mean scores of urban boys and girls across various levels of academic anxiety. It is clear from the table that at low level of academic anxiety, boys were found to have mean value of  $6.95 \pm 0.91$ . Whereas girls were found to have mean value of  $8.36 \pm 0.67$ . The significant t-value ( $t=4.48, p \leq 0.05$ ) indicated that at low level of academic anxiety, girls had higher scores than boys. Though the mean scores of boys ( $16.9 \pm 1.45$ ) at high level of academic anxiety was found little higher than the mean scores of girls ( $15.5 \pm 0.71$ ), but the difference was found non-significant. However, at medium level of academic anxiety the mean value of boys was found to be  $9.86 \pm 0.79$  and in case of girls it was found to be  $12.35 \pm 1.18$ . The significant ( $t=8.60, p \leq 0.05$ ) difference in the mean values indicated significant gender differences in the levels of academic anxiety experienced by the two groups with higher mean values found in case of girls. The result depicted that girls experienced more academic anxiety as compared to the boys.

### Conclusion :

The results of the study suggested that urban adolescent girls experienced greater stress related with academics than urban adolescent boys. Hence, there is need to sensitize adolescent girls on the issues of academic anxiety. Educational programmes should be planned to teach management of academic anxiety among adolescents girls in schools and colleges. The result also emphasised the need to teach simple strategies to adolescent girls for managing their anxiety effectively. Parent education programme can also be initiated so that parents can guide and provide practical support to girls on issues related to academic performance.

### Authors' affiliations:

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

### ■ REFERENCES

- Chatterjee, S., Mukerjee, M., Chakraborty, S.M. and Hssan, M.K. (1976)**. Effect of sex urbanization and caste on anxiety. *J. Psychol. Res.*, **20** (2) : 56-58.
- Durette, M. (1965)**. Normative data on manifest scale for different income levels. *Indian J. Psychol.*, **40** : 1-6.
- Katyal, S. and Bindra, H. (1995)**. Academic achievement : some determinants. *Indian Psychol. Rev.*, **44** : 20-25.
- Lewinsohn, P.M., Gotib, I.H. and Lewinsohn, M. (1998)**. Gender differences in anxiety disorders and anxiety symptoms in adolescents. *J. Abnormal Psychol.*, **107** : 109-117.
- Nijhawan, H.K. (1972)**. *Book-anxiety in school children*. Wiley-Kastern, NEW DELHI (INDIA).
- Sharma, K.L. and Gandhi, N. (1971)**. Hierarchies and amount of fear in low and high anxious groups of students. *Indian Psychol. Rev.*, **8** : 29-30.
- Sharma, S. and Rao, U. (1984)**. Test anxiety research in India: A review of research. *Adv. J. Res.*, **3** : 255-264.
- Singh, A.R. and Gupta, A.S. (1984)**. Academic anxiety scale for children (AASC). National Psychological Corporation, Agra (U.P.) INDIA.
- Sud, A. and Sharma, H. (1989)**. Test anxiety, intrusive thoughts and attention processes. *J. Personal. & Clinic. Stud.*, **5**:139-145.
- Sud, A. and Sharma, S. (1990)**. Examination stress and test anxiety: A cross cultural perspective. *Psychol. & Develop. Societ.*, **2** (2) : 183-201.
- Sud, S. (1994)**. Effects of test anxiety, ego-stress and attentional skills training on arithmetic reasoning: an experimental education of a brief counselling strategy. *Anxiety Stress & Coping*, **8** : 73-84.

9<sup>th</sup>  
Year  
★★★★★ of Excellence ★★★★★