

ACADEMIC ANXIETY AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN INDIA

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Abstract

Purpose: The broad objective of the present study is to study the academic anxiety pattern of adolescents in district Rajouri, Jammu & Kashmir, India and to explore the relationship between academic anxiety and academic achievement among the adolescents of Rajouri, India.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The study used a descriptive survey method involving a group of 312 adolescents, aged 13-15 years studying in grade 10 selected randomly from four Secondary Schools of district Rajouri, Jammu and Kashmir, India. The sampled respondents were assessed for academic anxiety using Academic Anxiety Scale for Children developed by A. K. Singh and A. Sen Gupta, 2009.

Findings: Findings revealed that 41.67 per cent adolescents were reported as having moderate academic anxiety and high academic anxiety respectively. Also results showed that gender and school type had significant influence on the academic anxiety; however family type had no effect on the anxiety. Further correlation analysis showed an inverse relationship existed between academic anxiety and academic achievement among the adolescents of Rajouri.

Practical Implications: The findings of the study highlighted the need for facilitating anxiety prevention efforts both at family and school level as it can hamper the academic growth of the adolescents.

Originality/value: Rajouri is a far flung, backward and border area in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, India. This study is a fresh attempt to explore the academic stress level and academic status of adolescents of this region.

Keywords: Academic anxiety, adolescents, academic achievement



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Introduction

Adolescence is a transitional phase of growth and development between childhood and adulthood. Hall (1904) denoted this period as “Storm and Stress” and states “conflict at this developmental stage is normal”. According to Erikson (1963), the chief task of the adolescent is to develop a sense of personal identity. It is during this period that the adolescent has to realise his self concept and develop new conceptions about his roles. This is an age of rapid development and is associated with many physiological, biological and mental changes.

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These changes may create mental, social, emotional and behavioural problems. Among emotional problems, anxiety, excessive fear, phobias, extreme sensitivity, shyness, timidity, difficulty in making friends, social withdrawal, mood swings, depression, day dreaming, jealousy etc are most common among adolescents that are manifested in their behavioural patterns. According to a survey conducted by the National Educational Association in USA (1975), factors leading to emotional and behavioural problems were found to be irresponsible parents, poor home conditions, irrelevant curriculum, overcrowded classrooms and lack of authority of teacher (Kapur, 1995). The alarming situation is that these problems if do not taken care off can potentially affect the academic performance of adolescents.

Anxiety is one of the most studied problems of adolescents. Anxiety is one of the most common psychological disorders in school-aged children and adolescents worldwide (Costello *et al.*, 2003). Anxiety is associated with substantial negative effects on children's social, emotional and academic success (Essau *et al.*, 2000). Specific effects include poor social and coping skills, often leading to avoidance of social interactions (Albano *et al.*, 2003; Weeks *et al.*, 2009), loneliness, low self-esteem, perceptions of social rejection, and difficulty forming friendships (Bokhorst *et al.*, 2001; Weeks *et al.*, 2009). Importantly, school avoidance, decreased problem-solving abilities, and lower academic achievement have also been noted as consequences (Donovan & Spence, 2000; Rapee *et al.*, 2005; McLoone *et al.*, 2006). Even students who do well on class work and homework can suffer from test anxiety and do poorly on tests (Bensoussan, 2012). High levels of academic anxiety can negatively affect working memory (Owens *et al.*, 2012). Masson *et al.* (2004) found that high school students with high test-anxiety had a poor school performance. Nadeem *et al.* (2012) also reported a negative relationship between academic anxiety and academic achievement.

Academic anxiety is a kind of state anxiety which relates to the impending danger from the environment of the academic institutions including teachers, certain subjects like Mathematics, English etc (Rohen Meetei, 2012). Anxiety is considered to be a universal phenomenon existing across cultures, although its contexts and manifestations are influenced by cultural beliefs and practices (Good and Kleinman, 1985; Guarnaccia, 1997). Stress and anxiety due to personal or family related problems also leads to a feeling of academic anxiety (Mayya *et al.*, 2004). There are many sources of creating anxiety during study, according to Guerrero (1990) anxiety sources can be interpreted on difference age level, social class, high activity, greater familiarity, gender, and culture ecosystem. Main factors responsible for

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generating academic anxiety are categorised into personal, familial, social and institutional. Personal factors include emotional disorders, health disorders, maladjustment, low self concept, low aspiration level, intelligence levels etc. (Joshi, 1988; Kaur, 1991; Verma, 1992). Familial factors include low socio economic status, lack of guidance, indifferent attitude of parents and other family problems (Barinder, 1985; Sabapathy, 1986; Yadav 1989; Gautam, 2011). Social factors include irrational norms imposed on someone, castism, unequal distribution of resources, illiterate locality etc. (Sridevi 2013). Institutional Factors may be related to the school type (Government Private School), school environment, curricular and co-curricular aspects, teacher student relationship etc. (Mohanty, 1985; Deb and Walsch, 2010; Mahtao and Jangir, 2012; Mattoo and Nabi 2012). However, in India, the main cause of academic anxiety among school children and adolescents is parents' high educational expectations and pressure for academic achievement (Deb, 2001). In the contemporary world, adolescent has to face competition in all areas of life specifically in academics. The competition and the pressure of earning higher grades increase the intensity of academic anxiety that may lead to very fatal consequences. Many instances were reported where high levels of anxiety develop suicidal tendencies among children (Cogle *et al.*, 2009; Lenzenweger *et al.*, 2007). It is relevant to mention here that in one year alone in India, 2320 children, or more than six children per day, committed suicide because of failure in examinations (National Crime Records Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, 2000). This figure goes on increasing year after year and in 2015, the number of student suicides stood at 8,934. Every hour, one student commits suicide in India, according to 2015 data (the latest available) from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). The number of attempted suicides, many unreported, is likely to be much higher. This shocking increase in student suicides underlines the seriousness of this problem and its resounding social costs to communities. Thus it is the need of the hour to conduct studies in the area of academic anxiety and to extract possible measures to counter it.

Previous researches on the demographic correlates of anxiety reported well-established relationships with gender, but little evidence for consideration of school type. Gender effects for anxiety disorders and symptoms have been found in studies of children and adolescents in English-speaking countries. Generally, more girls than boys develop anxiety disorders and symptoms. Adolescent girls report a greater number of worries, more separation anxiety, and higher levels of generalized anxiety (Campbell and Rapee, 1994; Copyright © 2018, *Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies*

Poulton *et al.*, 2001; Costello, Egger and Angold, 2003; Weiss and Last, 2001; Khemka and Rathod, 2016). However evidences in favour of male students to be more anxious were also reported (Barinder, 1985; Deb and Walsh, 2010). Still some researchers reported that there are no gender differences in terms of academic anxiety (Ghaderi *et al.*, 2009; Banga, 2014).

Parenting practices and parent–child relationships are also linked to anxiety (Rapee, 1997). Kumar (2013) found that the academic anxiety and home environment of adolescents correlated significantly. It is quite expected that children getting a more supportive and caring environment experience less anxiety. The more quality time they spend with the family lesser the intensity of academic anxiety (Deb and Walsh, 2010).

Since the studies addressing academic anxiety of adolescents provide mixed results, it was considered relevant to explore this concept further. Moreover, there is no single study reported in the Jammu and Kashmir state of India that attempted to study the academic anxiety of the secondary school students of district Rajouri. The aims of the study are twofold; first to understand adolescents' academic anxiety across gender, school type and family type and second to investigate the relationship of academic anxiety with academic achievement. The following hypotheses are formulated for empirical verification:

1. The adolescents of Rajouri district experience moderate academic anxiety.
2. The academic anxiety of adolescent boys and girls does not differ significantly.
3. The academic anxiety of adolescents belonging to government and private schools does not differ significantly.
4. The academic anxiety of adolescents belonging to joint families and nuclear families does not differ significantly
5. There exist a significant relationship between academic anxiety and academic achievement of adolescent students of district Rajouri.

Method

Sample

Participants in the study were a group of 312 adolescents, aged 13-15 years studying in grade 10. The participants were selected using random sampling technique such that the final sample was drawn from two government schools and two private schools of district Rajouri from Jammu & Kashmir state of India.

Materials

The study tools used for the present study were as follows:

- (i) Academic Anxiety Scale (A. K. Singh & A. Sen Gupta, 2009). The scale consists of 20 items with yes or no responses. Each item is scored as either +1 or 0. The maximum possible score of the test is 20. High scores on the scale indicate higher academic anxiety. Students scoring 07 and below were considered as students of low academic anxiety group; those scoring between 8-14 as average anxiety group and those scoring 15 and above as students belonging to high academic anxiety group.
- (ii) Personal Information Sheet: A personal information sheet was used for gathering information about the demographic and socioeconomic profile of the adolescents, their parent profile and type of family in which they are nurturing.
- (iii) Academic achievement Records: it comprises of the record of marks obtained by the sampled adolescent students in their previous class collected from the office record of the controller of examinations of the sampled schools.

Procedure

The investigators visited the selected schools personally and administered the Academic Anxiety Scale for Children (AASC) on 312 secondary school students. Data were collected with the voluntary consent of the adolescent participants. Voluntary consent was obtained after sharing the objectives of the study and reassuring the participants about their anonymity and the confidentiality of information they were providing. The completely filled questionnaires are retained and incomplete ones were discarded. The final data were collected from 312 students from secondary schools.

Data Analysis

Data collected from the adolescents were cleaned and prepared for analysis. Apart from descriptive statistics (percentage, mean, S.D), independent samples t-tests were applied for hypotheses verification.

Results

Background Information

The sample comprised of 312 adolescent students: 50% were boys and 50% were girls; all were selected from grade 10 of government and private schools of district Rajouri. Out of them, 48.39% were from joint families and 51.60% were from nuclear families.

Academic anxiety among Adolescents

To understand the academic anxiety faced by the adolescents, Academic anxiety scale was used. Data displayed in Table 1 show that the mean anxiety score of the total sample falls into the category of moderate anxiety group. Further analysis of data presented in Table 2 revealed that 41.67% of total students are reported to be having moderate level of academic anxiety. However equal number of students (41.67%) is reported in the group of students having high academic anxiety. The percent wise distribution of adolescent students on the basis of academic anxiety is presented in Figure 1.

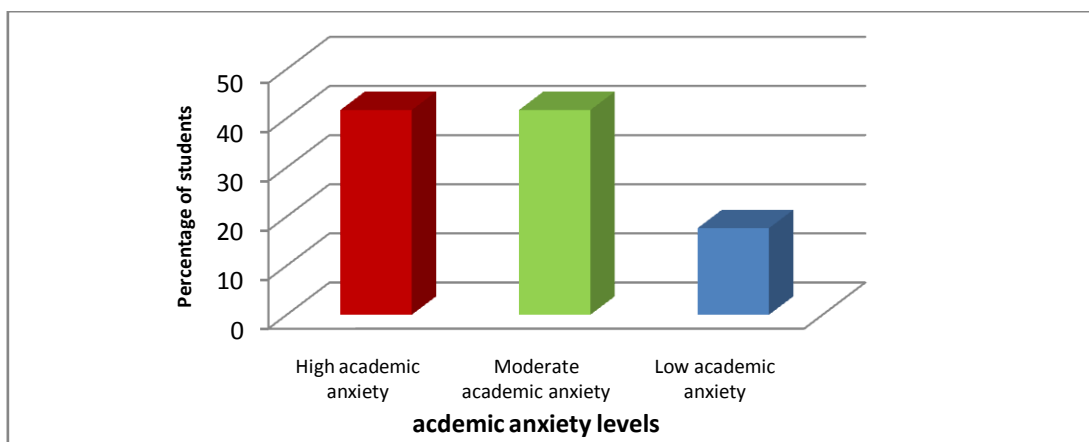


Figure 1: Percent distribution of adolescents according to their academic anxiety

On the basis of results, it can be inferred that the adolescent students of district Rajouri, Jammu and Kashmir, India, experience moderate academic anxiety that supports our first assumption.

Academic Anxiety in Relation to Gender

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare academic anxiety between adolescent boys and girls. Table 3 revealed that there was a significant difference in the mean anxiety score of adolescent boys (M=13.58, SD=5.18) and adolescent girls (M=11.62, SD=5.16); $t(310) = 3.347, p = 0.001$. These results suggest that gender has an effect of the academic anxiety of adolescents. Specifically, our results suggest that adolescent boys experience more academic anxiety as compared to adolescent girls in district Rajouri. Therefore null hypothesis stating “*The academic anxiety of adolescent boys and girls does not differ significantly*” is rejected. Gender wise comparison of academic anxiety of adolescents is presented graphically in Figure 2.

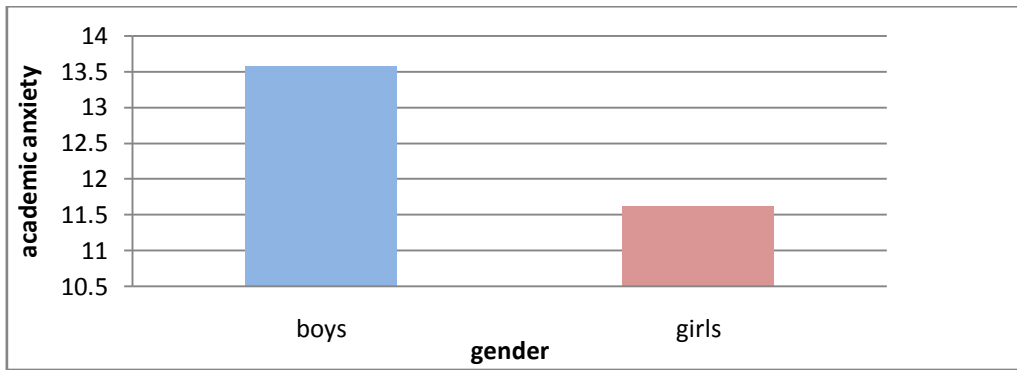


Figure 2: comparison of academic anxiety of adolescents in relation to gender

Academic Anxiety in Relation to School Type

To compare the academic anxiety of adolescent students of government and private schools, independent samples t-test was applied. Results revealed (Table 4) that adolescent students of government schools differ significantly in academic anxiety (M=13.19, SD=5.25) from adolescent students of private schools (M=12.03, SD=5.22); $t(310) = 1.973, p = 0.049$. These results indicate that school type has a significant influence on the academic anxiety of adolescent students (Figure 3).

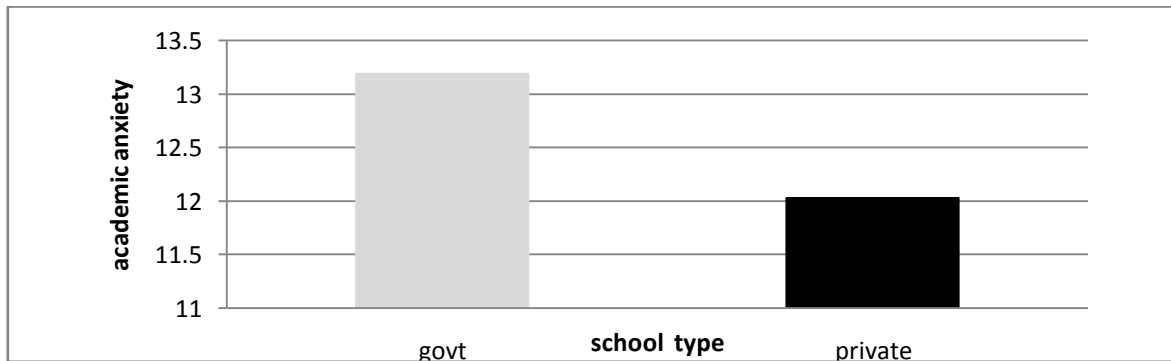


Figure 3: Comparison of academic anxiety of govt and private school adolescent students. Specifically, our results suggest that adolescent students of government schools of district Rajouri experience more academic anxiety than their private school counterparts. Therefore hypothesis stating “The academic anxiety of adolescents belonging to government and private schools does not differ significantly” stands rejected.

Academic Anxiety in Relation to Family Type

In order to compare the academic anxiety of adolescents belonging to joint family and nuclear family, their scores on academic anxiety scale were subjected to independent samples t-test. Results from Table 5 indicate that mean academic anxiety score of adolescents belonging to joint families (M=12.91, SD=5.21) is approximately equal to mean score

adolescents belonging to nuclear families ($M= 12.32, SD=5.31$); $t(310) = 0.991, p = 0.049$. These results suggest that family type does not have any effect on the academic anxiety of adolescents of district Rajouri. Results are depicted graphically in Figure 4.

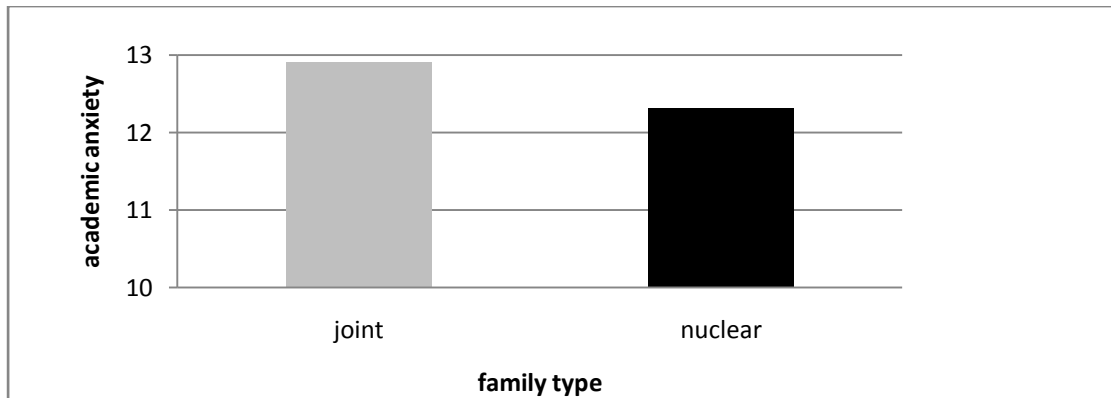


Figure 4: Comparison of academic anxiety of adolescents belonging to joint and nuclear families

To be specific, our results indicate that adolescents belonging to joint families and nuclear families experience similar type of moderate academic anxiety. Thus hypothesis stating “*The academic anxiety of adolescents belonging to joint families and nuclear families does not differ significantly*” is retained.

Relationship between Academic Anxiety and Academic Achievement

A Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between academic achievement and academic anxiety among adolescent students of district Rajouri. Table 6 illustrates that there is a substantial negative correlation between the two variables, $r = - 0.584, n = 312, p = 0.000$. In other words it can be inferred that increase in academic anxiety among adolescent students would result in a decline in their academic performance. Specifically, our results indicate that increased levels of academic anxiety resulted in low academic achievement among the adolescent students of district Rajouri. Therefore hypothesis stating “*There exist a significant relationship between academic anxiety and academic achievement of adolescent students of district Rajouri*” is accepted.

Discussion

This study measured academic anxiety of adolescents and explored some of the predictors of anxiety among them. Also the study was focussed to investigate the nature of relationship between academic anxiety and academic achievement.

The research study reported that the adolescent students of district Rajouri suffers with moderate academic anxiety which is in line with the findings of Deb, Chatterjee and Walsch (2010) who also revealed that adolescents had high academic anxiety in Kolkata city. However it was also found that a sufficient number of students experience high academic anxiety. The results highlighted the urgency of initiating the efforts for reducing the increasing levels of academic anxiety among adolescents. Remedial classes may be organised more frequently in order to solve the issue as suggested by

Findings emerging from gender wise comparison revealed that boys are more anxious about the academics as compared to girls. Similar results were reported by Pramod (1996). Ojha (2005) also revealed that 25% boys have extremely high anxiety whereas only 6.7% girls have high academic anxiety. Later Deb et al (2010) reported boys as more anxious as compared to girls. However, there are conflicting findings also which reported girls as more anxious than boys (Campbell & Rapee, 1994; Poulton *et al.*, 2001; Weiss and Last, 2001; Costello, Egger and Angold, 2003; Khemka and Rathod, 2016). The differences in findings could be attributed to the mindset of Indian society where boys are considered to be meant as earning member thus experience more pressure to excel in academics for getting jobs at the appropriate age in their lives. Still there is a study revealing that gender has no impact on the academic anxiety of adolescents (Thakur and Kumar, 2014). Also Tina and Annayat (2014) showed that there exists no significant difference in academic anxiety of adolescent boys and girls having agriculture, fine arts and science as area of educational interest. The contradictory results thus highlighted the need for more in-depth investigations in this area.

Another finding of the study revealed that govt school students of district Rajouri had more academic anxiety as compared to private school students. Other researchers also reported similar results. For instance Mahato and Jahangir (2012) revealed that the type of school and the environment had a significant relation with the academic anxiety. Saket Bihari (2014) showed that there is a significant difference between mean scores of government and private secondary school students. Later, Khemka and Rathod (2016) also revealed that boys of government schools had more academic anxiety than boys of private schools. The difference between govt and private school adolescents may attribute to the teaching environment and there are evidences highlighting that private schools of J&K state have lower pupil-teacher ratios (Sofi *et al.*, 2017) thereby increasing the attention of teacher for each student which may contribute in reducing the academic anxiety among the students.

Familial factors no doubt are important factor for providing proper support and motivation to the adolescents for performing better in reducing academic anxiety. These include poor socio economic status, divorced parents, separation from family, poor family environment, authoritarian parents etc. (Barinder, 1985; Mehrotra, 1986; Sabapathy, 1986; Yadav, 1989; Gautam, 2011). However the type of family is not found to be a significant predictor of academic anxiety. The finding clearly showed that whether the adolescent belong to joint family or nuclear family, it has no influence on his/her academic anxiety. This result is supported from the findings of Banga (2014) who also revealed that family type is not a significant predictor of academic anxiety of adolescents. However the quality time spent by the adolescent with the family can change the results; thus this area needs more exhaustive investigations.

The relationship between anxiety and academic performance has been described in a number of findings relevant to the understanding of adolescents (Phillips, 1978; Tobias, 1979; Sarason, 1980). The finding of the present study showed an inverse relationship between academic anxiety and academic achievement among adolescents. The result is quite expected and draws confirmation from a number of studies conducted earlier reporting that school students with higher level of anxiety have lower academic performance (Hamzah, 2007; Luigi, *et al.*, 2007; McCraty, 2007; Sena, *et al.*, 2007; Rana and Mahmood, 2010). Similar to our finding, it has been reported by several researchers that there is a negative correlation between academic anxiety and academic achievement (Hancock, 2001; Cassady Johnson, 2002; Jing, 2007; Peleg, 2009; Ali *et al.*, 2013). Anxiety can negatively affect academic performance (Owens *et al.*, 2012). Students who report higher levels of anxiety show lower levels of academic achievement. However, not all levels of anxiety are bad. Low levels of anxiety may be helpful to some students.

Conclusion

Results of the present study on 312 adolescents of Rajouri district of Jammu and Kashmir, India, show that academic anxiety is prevalent among the adolescents of district and majority of them experience moderate as well as high levels of anxiety. On the basis of results, it can be concluded that gender and type of school are significant predictors of academic anxiety among adolescents and anxiety is negatively correlated with academic achievement of adolescents. The findings of the study highlighted the need for facilitating anxiety prevention

efforts both at family and school level as it can hamper the academic growth of the adolescents.

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