A Study on Anxiety Disorder among Class X Students

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Abstract

Anxiety is a common phenomenon, and sometimes it may be diagnosed as a mental disorder. In India, one of the causes of anxiety among adolescents is parents' high educational expectations and pressure for academic achievement. The study examines anxiety levels in class X (10th) students who have complained of sleep disturbances, day-to-day stress from changes in their body, and academic stress, which includes exam fear, competition, peer pressure, assignments, and overwork. Early diagnosis of anxiety symptoms would help optimize student management and may lead to favourable long-term academic outcomes.

Keywords: Anxiety; Adolescents; Students; Academic stress

Introduction

Anxiety disorders (ADs) are among the most common psychiatric illnesses that impact the quality of life and functioning, and productivity of an individual [1]. Mental health remains a hush-hush issue in India despite the extremely high rate of anxiety, depression and other mental health issues among youngsters, especially aggravated during the hardships of COVID-19, coupled with the lockdown. Anxiety is one emotion where tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes such as increased blood pressure and pulse rate happen in the presence of any internally or externally anticipated danger.

Though anxiety is a common phenomenon, sometimes it may be diagnosed as a mental disorder. Anxiety will be called a mental disorder when it persists for a longer duration and affects normal daily life [2]. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5), five types of mental disorders come under the anxiety group. They are generalized anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and social phobia (or social anxiety disorder). Anxiety disorders are found to be one of the most common mental health disorders in the adolescent age group, i.e., 10-19 years. The adolescent age group is a risk factor for mental disorders due to psychological and physiological changes [3].

Need of the Study in the Indian Scenario

In India, parents' high educational expectations and pressure for academic achievement are the main accepted causes of anxiety among school children and adolescents [4]. In India, this is amplified in secondary school, where all 16-year-old children attempt the first ever board examination, in their class X. These secondary examinations are conducted by different boards of education such as CBSE, ICSE, or State Board, unlike the school level examinations the students would have faced during the completion of each class from 1-9th standard. The secondary examination results are vital for individuals since it is the determining criteria to seek admission to a high-quality senior secondary school and a preferred academic stream. There is fierce competition among students since the number of these educational institutions is fewer than the number of students. Therefore, parents urge their children to perform well in the first board examination and, to meet this end, they may appoint three to four private tutors or more for special guidance. After the secondary examination, all these students may appear in the class XII Board Examination, known as the 'Higher Secondary Examination'. Competition is again ferocious as performance in this examination determines university entrance. Admission to courses in Medicine, Engineering and Management are parents' most preferred choices because these qualifications are assumed to have a guaranteed future job prospects. It is relevant to mention

here that in the past few years in India, thousands of students, 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). This shocking figure underlines the seriousness of this problem and its resounding social costs to communities [5].

Toward strengthening mental health services across India, National Mental Health Survey (NMHS) 2016 was conducted to understand the burden of mental disorders. It focused on the prevalence estimates, treatment gaps, and the disability of mental disorders in a nationally representative population. In an epidemiological study from India, 14.5 per cent of adolescents suffered from anxiety disorders. A survey conducted by UNICEF and Gallup in early 2021 with 20,000 children and adults in 21 countries found that in India, only 41 per cent of young people aged 15-24 years in India said that it was good to get support for mental health problems. A series of experimental research has provided empirical support for the causative role of negative imagery in social anxiety [6-8].

Methodology of the Study

The study aimed to evaluate the prevalence of anxiety symptoms in school students studying in class X (10th). Students have the most common anxiety disorder symptoms in this stage of adolescence. The study interviewed forty-five (45) students in Belagavi city of Karnataka state, India. Recognising anxiety disorders in school students pursuing class X is imperative, as they will face their first-ever board exam. It will predict adult anxiety disorders and other psychopathologies such as depression, substance use problems and suicide attempts [9,10].

Discussion

Indian families have differential expectations about the likely outcomes of education for boys and girls. Investment in schooling for daughters is seen primarily as a route to attaining better marriage prospects. However, investment in sons' education is related to the expectation that their future employment will provide familial security. Although statistically significant, the difference between the mean anxiety scores of boys and girls is not contextually substantial. Therefore, adolescent girls' anxiety levels cannot be dismissed simply because the levels are, on average, lower than adolescent boys [5]. Anxiety is one of the most common psychological disorders in school students and adolescents worldwide. Anxiety disorders usually remain undiagnosed in school students owing to the internalized nature of their symptoms.

Out of forty-five (45) student respondents, twenty-seven (27) had high anxiety. It is perhaps not surprising that students became more anxious over their academic success. Most respondents revealed that anxiety interferes more with academic performance during class 10th than in their previous classes, VIII and IX. The relationship between respondents' academic success and anxiety is curvilinear - a minimal amount of anxiety tends to enhance academic performance, but excessive anxiety undermines academic performance [11].

In terms of adolescents' perceptions of the quality and quantity of time spent with their parents, respondents felt they received quality time from their mothers while noticeably less quality time from their fathers. However, only a few respondents received quality time from their mothers and fathers. Anxiety was higher among students who had working mothers than among students having non-working mothers.

Anxiety was found to be highest for the respondents belonging to the middle-class family (socio-economic condition), followed by the respondents belonging to the lower and higher socio-economic class family. In India, economic and social development is under great pressure. This is keenly felt by the middle class, who are under greater stress to hold their ground, protect their social position and move ahead [12]. The frequency of anxiety disorders tends to decrease with higher socio-economic status.

In a nutshell, results of this study of 45 respondents in Belagavi show that anxiety was prevalent in the sample of boys and less among girls registering high anxiety. Although modest, the study's findings support anxiety prevention efforts for respondents and mental health promotion efforts aimed at students' parents. Parent education is specifically required in this context to deal with the phenomenon of educational pressure and the comparison of the performance of one's child with the best-ranked students. The majority of the respondents revealed that their parents are concerned about pushing their children towards success and financial independence. This kind of threat from parents does not allow respondents to have educational and career options and explore life. If parents do not break free of this burden of the psychological habit of anxiety, they will also pass it on to their children. Anxiety among respondents is the fear of growing up and handling responsibilities. They see their parents living mechanical lives and working day and night to make a living, to feed and fulfil family members' desires. Respondents experiencing such a kind of consciousness around them feel that life is more of a burden than a delight.

The study examines higher anxiety levels in respondents who have complained sleep disturbances. The most common sources of day-to-day stress for respondents are changes in their body, academic stress, which includes exam fear, competition, preparing for the examination, class work preparation, type of syllabus and overwork, problems with peers, unsafe living environment/ neighbourhood [13]. Thus, any form of anxiety can affect the student's performance and lead to other comorbidities in the future. Academic curriculum of class X should be flexible enough to give some time for relaxation and make the school environment friendlier for the students. The findings of this study have pointed out the serious anxiety problem among students studying 10th.

Students should feel free to express their views; the school and parents should impose fewer restrictions on them.

To Sum Up

Understanding the epidemiology of psychiatric disorders is essential to plan and implementing effective mental health policies and programs. Epidemiological surveys estimating the prevalence of anxiety disorders in developing countries like India are limited. Most of them are confined to certain geographical regions and cannot be generalised because of their small sample sizes, lower response rates, and methodology limitations [14]. Early diagnosis of anxiety symptoms would help optimize student management and may lead to favourable long-term academic and social outcomes. A more extensive representative survey to estimate the prevalence of anxiety disorders was a felt need [15-17].

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