

Exam anxiety: A Comparative Study of Normal and Impaired Individuals

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Abstract

Stress and anxiety play a significant role in the grades of students and accounts for their negative psychological and mental behavior. This study aims at comparing exam anxiety among normal and special children. The result of the comparison explains the reasons for anxiety. The paper also gives some recommendations to overcome the problem of anxiety. This study is qualitatively cross-sectional. The data was randomly selected from the private and governmental educational sector of Sargodha, Pakistan from the 5th of October to the 19th of October 2017. As a methodology, 20 individuals of matric level were selected randomly from private and governmental sectors of both special and normal individuals. 10 individuals were special, and 10 individuals were normal individuals. Anxiety among these individuals was measured by the help of the state-trait anxiety inventory instrument. The findings of the results concluded that student's self-created fears play a significant role in triggering anxiety among learners. The ratio of special children under the effect of anxiety was higher in terms of confidence, controlling of nerves, exam hall ease and nausea before the exam as compared to normal individuals. Normal individuals lacked concentration, and their overthinking of getting fail was the reason for exam anxiety. Self-created fears were found to be the sole cause of anxiety among normal individuals as compared to impaired individuals where the natural deficiency emotionally destabilizes them and causes loss of their confidence. Dodson's law has been found to overcome anxiety disorders among both types of individuals.

Keywords: Dodson's law, Emotional instability, Exam anxiety, Exam phobia, Special children, State trait anxiety inventory.

Introduction

The term exam anxiety gets more complexed with the individuals who face some medical problems over the years. The causes may be different but the effect of this is the same as that of a normal individual. Studies have also shown that people face grater problems who are physically impaired in testing situations. Hancock, 2010 stated that the problem of anxiety and low academic achievement is greater for students with disabilities. People with disabilities have basic psychological and neurological impairments that resist their ability to perform well in some academic areas.

This paper focuses on eliciting anxiety among 10 normal individuals and 10 physically impaired individuals. Some researchers believe that there exists a direct relationship between learners and their performance. While some believe that there is little, if any, relationship exists between the two.

Anxiety is a psychological condition in which people experience extreme distress and anxiety in testing situations. While some people face anxiety or distress before and during exams, that can negatively affect learning and test performance. This basic emotion of a human being could have both types of effects. People sometimes could be induced to work hard and their level of perfor-

mance increases. This law is referred to as Yerkes – Dodson’s law which showed a relationship between arousal and performance. But at the same time, some people face negative effects, and this reduces their competence level too.

Studies have revealed that test anxiety is a prevalent issue now a day. The major causes of it are parental attitudes, high grades expectations, and admission to high institutions. Medical students have also been a sufferer of exam anxiety. Stress has been studied as the major source of affecting the liver and renal transplant recipients negatively. Undergraduate students are the major recipients found in stress and anxiety. Hostilities’ undergraduates face such issues due to the pressure of passing the exam, expectation of meeting up the family and feeling home sick⁹.

Being nervous and emotional are two different things. Emotions could be based on reality or imagination. But the test anxiety involves both the things working simultaneously. Pre-Exam and After-exam nervousness affect the emotional and motivational points of a person. If it gets unchecked it may prove fatal to the personality of a person.

The Law of Attraction has proved to be the self- motivating law that encourages the learners to get themselves out of their fears. Focusing on an individual, it helps to rebuild the tattered individual and helps him regain his confidence. Moreover, making the individual able to work out for his thoughts and controlling his procrastination helps him to take control of his anxiety especially of exams.

A little bit of nervousness can be helpful, making you feel mentally alert and ready to tackle the challenges presented in an exam. Exam anxiety has become one of the major dilemmas in recent years. To cope with this many research has been made. The trend has moved towards exploring test anxiety in physically impaired people. Research has explored that there is a direct link between test anxiety and cognitive deficits. Emotional and anxiety level in impaired people is seen at the extended level than normal individuals. However, the fearful symptoms in them are at a higher level than a cognitive one.

Gender-based studies have also been done in examining test anxiety. Males are found to have a lower level of anxiety than females. Different explanations have been provided to the achieved result. Some suggest that there is an equal distribution of stress among genders but as females possess a higher level of emotions, so anxiety level is seen higher in them.

Students' fears have been recorded as a major cause of their failure. Most individuals cannot focus on academics because of their unknown fears. When students are preoccupied with tension, fear, nervousness, and anxiety they are distracted from the main path and various stressors burden them down. The sense of competition also evolved with time so students to compete could not ponder over their academics which proves hazardous while taking the test. However, test anxiety is seen to be influential to overall academic success. Anxiety itself is a disturbing factor in one’s life that promotes negative psychology and depression.

The study is a comparative study and its objective is to study the level of anxiety and it provides the solution to overcome the problem of anxiety. The rationale of this study is to find out the anxiety level and its reasons in individuals peculiar to academic discipline. State trait anxiety inventory is an instrument that measures the general measure of anxiety and its symptoms. It is a self-administered report that includes two types of sub-scales; state anxiety and trait anxiety scale. They measure the current anxiety level and calmness, confidence, and security respectively. The results from the measuring scale have provided with the reasons for anxiety and possible solutions to get rid of anxiety disorders.

Research Questions

How anxiety differs in special children than do others?

How can we overcome such anxiety issues?

Limitations

This study places specific i.e. the schools that were taken under study were from Sargodha city. The cultural and atmospheric variance affect the psychological behavior of an individual. The exam anxiety level and behavior are not place oriented. The results of the study might vary by varying space and place.

Methodology

This study is a cross-sectional comparative study. 10 normal individuals and 10 physically impaired individuals were selected randomly. These individuals belonged to matric level from governmental and private institutes. Students who were doing A and O levels were avoided to be a part of the study. The study proved to be gender-biased because the individuals that were selected belonged to the female gender only. The questionnaire was filled by these individuals to access the anxiety level and its symptoms. The questionnaire was based on the state-trait anxiety inventory instrument. The 10 items of the questionnaire were ranked by Likert scale into rarely, sometimes, often and almost always. The filled questionnaire was assessed, and the percentage of impaired and normal individuals was found out by the mean average score of each item. The results showed an overall higher percentage of anxiety among special children.

Results

Table 1. Anxiety Categories, Normal and Impaired Individuals.

Statement	Normal individual	Physically impaired individuals
Confidence	70%	20%
Confused	40%	70%
Concept remembrance	60%	70%
Concept forgetfulness	40%	30%
Controlling the nerves	90%	60%
Ease at exam level	50%	30%
Concentration on work	10%	30%
Fear of failure	30%	10%
Nausea before or during the exam	20%	80%
Negative Thoughts	50%	50%

The confidence level of an individual has an inverse relation to the stress of an individual. The confidence level in normal individuals is 70% as compared to physically impaired individuals where it stands for 20%. The confusion level in normal individuals seems to be lower as compared to physically impaired individuals. Normal individuals remember the concepts, but the physically impaired individuals have greater remembrance capacity. 40% of the normal individuals responded with forgetfulness of concepts. 30% of physically impaired individuals pertain to forgetting the concepts. Being confident normal individuals have a greater capacity of controlling the nerves as compared to physically impaired individuals. Normal individuals responded with greater competency level at exam hall as compared to physically impaired individuals. 30% of physically impaired individuals responded with a concentration on work while 10% of normal individuals responded that they work with concentration. Fear of failure is seen higher in the ratio of 30 and 10 in normal and

impaired individuals respectively. The nervousness level of physically impaired individuals is seen higher to correspond to those who are normal. Negative thoughts while in the exam hall and after exam prevail equally in both types of individuals.

Discussion

Anxiety, depression, and nostalgia are the terms that are frequently being used these days. 80% of the world population is under the stress of this notion. More commonly it is observed now a day in the student group, where the exam schedule follows the stress pattern in these individuals (Flannery, 2018). Anxiety interferes with student's academic records and obstructs the way for remembrance of information during the exam. Further, a higher level of anxiety can block the level of performance. It may obstruct the way for demonstrating what you know during the test.

The symptoms of test anxiety among individuals vary according to the intensity of stress. Various symptoms of anxiety fall into the following categories. (Matthew, et al, n.d.):

1. Physical: headaches along with nausea or diarrhea, extreme body temperature changes most likely high blood pressure or low blood pressure, sweating, shortness of breath, faintness or lightheadedness, increase in heartbeat, and dry mouth.
2. Emotional: Self-created fears / excessive fear, disappointments', anger and depression, uncontrollable emotions of opposite poles i.e. crying and laughing, helplessness and feeling of loss.
3. Behavioral: restlessness, pacing and strolling, talking abusive, avoiding everyone and every matter.
4. Cognitive: Sudden thoughts, fading off/ going blank, difficulty in concentrating, negative thoughts and talks, comparing oneself to others, feelings off dead or dread, organization of thoughts difficult.

Emotions full of stress can inhibit a student's ability to gather, apprehend and recall information and subject matter. Anxiety fills the mind with slots and as a result, mental functioning becomes static. A noise within the mind created by tension and negative thoughts overpowers the person and retreads the ability to comprehend and revive the information and functioning of systems (Matthew et al., n.d.).

The study shows that normal individuals have a higher confidence level as compared to physically impaired individuals. Confusion, nausea before exam and concentration on work of normal individuals is seen as lower as compared to the other individuals. Apart from all these, normal individuals are having a high fear level of getting failed. These individuals have a lower level of remembering the concepts. But their confidence level enables them to get to the exam hall while controlling the nerves.

Physically impaired individuals have a low level of confidence, but their memory of memorizing the concepts is high. They have a high level of controlling the nerves but low as compared to normal individuals. The fear of being failed is low in them as compared to normal individuals. They work with concentration but somehow do not feel at ease in the examination hall and thus remain confused.

The behavior of normal and physically impaired individuals is not in a streamline to ask about their characteristics features that result in exam anxiety. The common pattern in both types of individuals is of self-created fears. For example, fear of failure, feeling nausea, and negative thoughts. The difference in both the individuals is that of confidence level and confused state. Physically impaired individuals do not feel confident because of their physical inability that leads them to complexes resulting in exam anxiety type of state. Normal individuals create fear over them and just

lack concentration in their work. These types of psychological behavior need to be addressed and their proper treatment needs to be given.

Overcoming exam anxiety

People could improve themselves by concentrating on strategies and tools that help them built up emotional skills along with healthy habits while preparing for tests. The need of the hour is to identify the factors responsible for heightening up anxiety. Moreover, some people consider it as abnormality but in actual stance, it is normal behavior of individuals. This normal behavior is supported by Yerkes-Dodson Law: a relationship between arousal levels and performance.

Dodson's Law:

According to this law increased arousal can help improve the performance but up to a certain level. But when arousal becomes excessive, performance diminishes. The mild electric shocks gave rats a stimulus to complete the maze, but the higher voltage shock caused the rats to move randomly and quickly to get out. The same is the case with human beings. Their performance level increases with the increase in anxiety and stress levels. But undue shocks could not make them able to work efficiently. The overall result of their performance gets nil. Such a case is popular amongst the students. During exams, the activity within the brain gets triggered up. Which in result stimulates other systems of the human body too. So, students within a night clear their concepts and get good grades.

The Law of Attraction:

To overcome anxiety “the law of Attraction” or “Universal Law” has provided a possible way. According to this law, an individual brings to himself what he thinks of. Emotions and actions are in the control of an individual and happening occur in consequence of these emotions. Every single being has the power to change through positive thought. Through positive thought, any individual could control the situation. A positive thought is a motivating force that keeps the person ambitious and free of any type of fear.

It is with the individual how he/she treats the situation. The power within an individual could heighten up or lower down the anxiety level as the thought pattern takes a swing. This law is favored by Albert Allis in the following words:

“You Are What You Think”.

But to have control over negative impulses and trigger up positive thought is a difficult task. This requires taking control over thoughts. How to control thoughts is the next question. The best solution is practicing this concept repeatedly. Say no to fear and stop thinking about the things that elevate your anxiety. Stay focused on the things that are positive in your life. Start welcoming the little happiness and joys in your life. This effort would not only help in lowering stress during the exam but is also of valuable importance in everyday life.

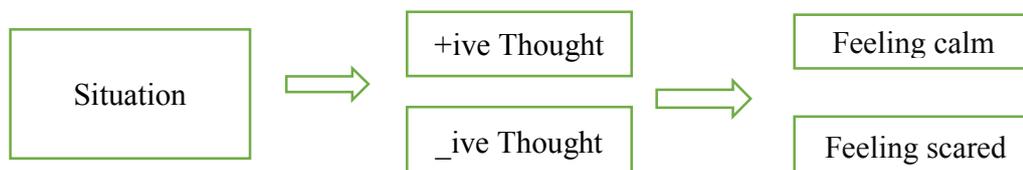
Realistic thinking:

Realistic thinking is another way to sort out the stress involved in anxiety and depression. It means that we should look at all sides of a picture. i.e. all aspects of a situation (the negative and positive, neutral) before concluding. In other words, realistic means looking at things in a balanced way.

Step 1: start self-talk and meditate:

Talking to yourself and collecting up your thoughts along with courage without being aloud makes you an independent being who could survive for himself. Everyone thinks in his way. This pattern of thinking influences our pattern of feeling. This involves the law of attraction. When we think of something as being bad- such as- failing in test, we stimulate our negative impulses. These impulses start working and the result ends up in poor performance and low grades. On the contrary, when you feel that you can pass a test the role of positive impulses gets stimulated and you feel calm.

Example:



Step 2: identification of thoughts that cause anxiety:

Identifying thoughts that are the sole cause of your anxiety is the first and foremost task of getting you rid of anxiety. It takes time and a lot of drills to identify those specific thoughts which makes you worried. Minor attention to the change in anxiety pattern is a clue to question yourself:

What is the thing that gets me to think negatively?

What am I thinking right now?

What bothers me a lot?

Which thing makes me feel worried?

Step3: Challenging “anxious” thoughts:

Out of five senses there exists a sixth sense. Relying solely on this sense is not a worthy act of wisdom. Because this sense fails us sometimes. All this happens while we think negatively. It is not necessary that when you think of something out of fear, that situation in actuality could take place. For example: thinking that you would fail a test, it doesn't need to happen in a real situation. Sometimes, our thoughts are just wild guesses. Therefore, it is highly helpful to challenge the thoughts that make you anxious.

Conclusion

Anxiety, depression, and stress are all inter-related terms. These terms have become common in everyday life. Their existence among students has been a major and existing trend that needs to be addressed. Physically impaired individuals have been under the stress due to their overbearing complexion of physical inability. Such considerations and anxieties are self-created as in normal individuals where the fear of failure overpowers them.

Dodson law establishes a link to getting out of exam anxiety. The arousal level or getting afraid of failing accordingly can make the individual perform well in the exam. Overconfidence could lead them to further anxiety issues. Moreover, realistic thinking when encouraged among students lead them to better results and getting rid of exam or test anxiety. Law of Attraction in practical terms of therapy can help the psychological behavior of individuals to be trained and aid them to work competently without anxiety.

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Appendix

Serial no:	Statement	Options	Percentage frequency	
			special	Normal
Total n= 20				
1	I feel confident.	Almost never Sometimes Often Almost always	6, 30% 2, 10% 1, 5% 1, 5%	4, 20% 1, 5% 3, 15% 2, 10%
2	I feel confused.	Almost never Sometimes Often Almost always	4, 20% 0, 0% 5, 25% 1, 5%	6, 30% 1, 5% 3, 15% 1, 5%
3	I forget the concepts.	Almost never Sometimes Often Almost always	7, 35% 0, 0% 1, 5% 2, 10%	5, 25% 1, 5% 3, 15% 1, 5%
4	I remember the concepts.	Almost never Sometimes Often Almost always	2, 10% 1, 5% 0, 0% 7, 35%	1, 5% 3, 15% 1, 5% 2, 25%
5	It gets difficult to control the nerves while in exam hall.	Almost never Sometimes Often Almost always	2, 10% 2, 10% 1, 5% 5, 25%	0, 0% 1, 5% 6, 30% 3, 15%
6	I am at ease while in exam hall.	Almost never Sometimes Often Almost always	4, 20% 3, 15% 2, 10% 1, 5%	3, 15% 2, 10% 5, 25% 0, 0%
7	I cannot concentrate on my work.	Almost never Sometimes Often Almost always	1, 5% 6, 30% 2, 10% 1, 5%	5, 25% 4, 20% 0, 0% 1, 5%
8	I am at loss when fear of failure overcomes.	Almost never Sometimes Often Almost always	4, 20% 5, 25% 1, 5% 0, 0%	4, 20% 3, 15% 2, 10% 1, 5%
9	I feel nausea during or before exams.	Almost never Sometimes Often Almost always	2, 10% 0, 0% 7, 35% 1, 5%	5, 25% 3, 15% 2, 10% 0, 0%
10	Negative thoughts prevail over me.	Almost never Sometimes Often Almost always	3, 15% 2, 10% 3, 15% 2, 10%	4, 20% 1, 5% 3, 15% 2, 10%