



## Paranormal Belief among School and College Going Students

**Dr. Arif Ali**

Assistant Professor, Department of Psychiatric Social Work ,LGB Regional Institute of Mental Health, Tezpur Assam, India

**Ms Sonia P. Deuri**

Associate Professor , Department of Psychiatric Social Work ,LGB Regional Institute of Mental Health, Tezpur Assam, India

**Masroor Jahan**

Associate Professor Department of Clinical psychology ,RINPAS Kanke Ranchi ,Jharkhand

### ABSTRACT

#### INTRODUCTION

*The generative mechanisms by which education influences paranormal beliefs are unknown. Present study aimed to assess influences of paranormal beliefs among school and college going students.*

#### METHODOLOGY

*The study was conducted on two groups of subjects, school going children and college going students. The sample included thirty students of Grade 7 to 9 standard and thirty first year university students of Tezpur college, Tezpur , Assam. Socio demographic sheet and Revised Paranormal Belief Scale (Tobacyk, 2004) was administered to both the groups of subject's.*

#### RESULTS

*School going children was found to have scored significantly higher than college going student in Revised Paranormal Belief Scale. Significant difference was found in all the seven dimension of Revised Paranormal Belief Scale (Traditional Religious Belief, Psi, Witchcraft, Superstition, Spiritualism, Extraordinary Life Forms, and Precognition) between school going children and college going student.*

#### CONCLUSION

*Our results showed that school going children had higher paranormal beliefs than college going students.*

**KEYWORDS:** Paranormal beliefs, school going children and college going student

### INTRODUCTION

Paranormal phenomena are defined as those that, if genuine, would violate basic limiting principles of science (Broad, 1953). Paranormal phenomena have also been defined as violating "our naive theories of the world" (Woolley, 1997) or "basic limiting principles which are commonly accepted either as self-evident or as established by overwhelming and uniformly favourable empirical evidence" (Broad, 1953). Paranormal is a general term that designates experiences that lie outside "the range of normal experience or scientific explanation". The term paranormal refers to hypothesized processes that in principle are "physically impossible" or outside the realm of human capabilities as presently conceived by conventional scientists (Thalbourne, 1982). The terms magical, paranormal, supernatural, and religious beliefs as well as superstition are often used non-synonymously.

Children learn to give intentional, psychological explanations for intended actions by the age of four years (Schult & Wellman, 1997; Wellman & Gelman, 1998). Core physical knowledge comprises understanding of physical objects and their movements such that objects have an independent existence in space, they have volume, and they cannot move through physical obstructions (Spelke, 2000; Wellman & Gelman, 1992; Wellman & Gelman, 1998). By four years, children have learned to give physical, non-intentional explanations for physically-caused movements (Schult & Wellman, 1997; Wellman & Gelman, 1998). The vast majority of core knowledge develops by preschool age and it encompasses an intuitive comprehension of physical, biological, and psychological entities as well as different forms of processes these entities engage in. The core of intuitive knowledge about psychological entities, in turn, consists of knowledge that animate beings are intentional agents who have a mind. By the middle of the second year children understand that animate beings can reciprocate actions and have a capacity to move and initiate actions without external force (Carey & Spelke, 1994; Rakison & Poulin-Dubois, 2001; Wellman & Gelman, 1992). In addition, small children understand that the contents of mind, such as thoughts, beliefs, desires, and symbols, are not substantial and objective but non-material and

mental, and that they do not have the properties they stand for (Johnson, 2000; Leslie et al , 2004; Piaget, 1929/ 1951; Wellman, 2002; Wellman & Gelman, 1998).

India is one of the most religiously diverse nations in the world, with some of the most deeply religious societies and cultures. Religion still plays a central and definitive role in the life of most of its people. According to Eugene M. Makar, that from an early age, children are reminded of their roles and places in society. This is reinforced by the fact that many believe gods and spirits have an integral and functional role in determining their life. In a multi cultural and polytheistic society like India, ritualistic behaviours and paranormal belief is ingrained in the general psyche of the individuals. Few studies have been carried out in the Indian setting on paranormal belief among school and college going students .

The present study focuses on paranormal beliefs among school and college going students in north eastern part of India.

### OBJECTIVE

- To assess and find out the difference in paranormal beliefs among school going children and college going students.

### METHOD AND MATERIAL

The sample included 30 students of Grade 7 to 9 and 30 first year university students of Tezpur, Assam. Socio-demographic data was prepared to obtain back ground information about the subject on dimensions like age, sex education religion etc .A 26-item Revised Paranormal Belief Scale was administered to both the group .A 26-item Revised Paranormal Belief Scale provides a measure of degree of belief in each of seven dimensions: Traditional Religious Belief, Psi, Witchcraft, Superstition, Spiritualism, Extraordinary Life Forms, and Precognition. Improvements from the original 25-item Paranormal Belief Scale (Tobacyk & Milford, 1983) include adoption of a seven-point rating scale as well as item changes for three subscales: Precognition ,Witchcraft ,and Extraordinary Life Forms. Sample was taken only from them who were willing to participate in the study. At first all the selected

sample was contacted individually and were taken consent to participate in the research conducted. They have been informed regarding purpose of the research. Firstly, socio-demographic details were collected then after Revised Paranormal Belief Scale were administered to both the group. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 13.0 was used for the analysis of the data of this study.

**RESULTS**

School going children mean with standard deviation of age were 12.90±80and in college going student mean with standard deviation of age was 16.36 ±.55, after applying the t test, significant difference at P <0 .01 was found (table 1). Table 2 shows Mean and Standard deviation of scores obtained by both the groups in total score of Revised Paranormal Belief Scale , after applying the t test, significant difference at P < 0.01 was found between the two group. Group difference in seven dimension of paranormal belief( Traditional Religious Belief, Psi, Witchcraft, Superstition, Spiritualism, Extraordinary Life Forms, and Precognition) was done between school going children and college going student and significant difference was found in all the seven dimension of Revised Paranormal Belief Scale table (3).

**Table 1 :Socio demographic profile of the entire sample**

| Variables | School going children<br>N=30 |         | College going student<br>N=30 |      | df | t        |
|-----------|-------------------------------|---------|-------------------------------|------|----|----------|
|           | Mean                          | SD      | Mean                          | SD   |    |          |
| Age       | 12.90                         | .803    | 16.36                         | .556 | 58 | 19.440** |
| Sex       | Male                          | 19(63%) | 20(66%)                       |      |    |          |
|           | Female                        | 11(36%) | 10(33%)                       |      |    |          |
| Education | 7th                           | 13(43%) | -                             |      |    |          |
|           | 8th                           | 13(43%) | -                             |      |    |          |
|           | 9th                           | 4(13%)  | -                             |      |    |          |
|           | BA( first year)               | -       | 30(100%)                      |      |    |          |
| Religion  | Hindu                         | 18(60%) | 11(36%)                       |      |    |          |
|           | Muslim                        | 3(10%)  | 12(40%)                       |      |    |          |
|           | Christians                    | 9(30%)  | 7(23%)                        |      |    |          |

\*\*P <0 .01

**Table: 2 Total score of Revised Paranormal Belief Scale**

| Variables                                      | School going children<br>N=30 |       | College going student<br>N=30 |       | df | t       |
|--|-------------------------------|-------|-------------------------------|-------|----|---------|
|  | Mean                          | SD    | Mean                          | SD    |    |         |
| Total score of Revised Paranormal Belief Scale | 106.40                        | 22.86 | 58.46                         | 24.57 | 58 | 7.822** |

\*\*P <0 .01

**Table 3  
Group difference in seven Dimension of Revised Paranormal Belief Scale**

| Dimension of Revised Paranormal Belief Scale | School going children |       | College going student |       | df | t       |
|--|-----------------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|----|---------|
|  | Mean                  | SD    | Mean                  | SD    |    |         |
| Traditional belief                           | 16.96                 | 4.055 | 8.60                  | 4.056 | 58 | 7.989** |
| Psi  | 14.76                 | 2.896 | 9.30                  | 3.583 | 58 | 6.498** |
| Witch craft                                  | 16.43                 | 4.861 | 9.10                  | 4.229 | 58 | 6.234** |
| Superstition                                 | 13.56                 | 3.945 | 8.33                  | 3.077 | 58 | 5.729** |
| Spiritualism                                 | 14.56                 | 3.370 | 8.06                  | 3.731 | 58 | 7.080** |
| Extra ordinary life form                     | 14.50                 | 3.803 | 7.70                  | 3.405 | 58 | 7.296** |
| Precognition                                 | 15.73                 | 4.025 | 7.76                  | 3.530 | 58 | 8.150** |

\*\*P <0 .01

**Discussion**

Historically, researchers have considered beliefs in superstition, magic, and the paranormal in some indefinite way both as distinct and interrelated phenomena. In the present study we found that Paranormal Belief was significantly higher in school going children than college going student and it was found that in all the seven domain of paranormal belief scale significant difference was found between the two groups. It is unknown whether paranormal beliefs can be reduced by education, and if they can whether one should teach critical thinking skills in general or certain subjects more specifically. In some studies, a low educational level has been connected to paranormal beliefs (Otis & Alcock, 1982) but in general the results have been inconsistent (The National Science Foundation, 2006; Vyse, 1997). Many researchers have, however, assumed that education reduces paranormal beliefs by developing critical thinking skills (Otis & Alcock, 1982; Za'rour, 1972).Paranormal and religious beliefs exist side by side with science both in a societal level and in the minds of individuals (Nemeroff & Rozin, 2000). Small sample size of the present study limits the generalization of results.

**CONCLUSION**

Our results showed that school going children had higher paranormal beliefs than college going students and thus we can say education has influences on paranormal beliefs.

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