



## FACTORS INFLUENCING ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN FACING BOARD EXAMS

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### ABSTRACT

**BACKGROUND:** Stress is often a trigger of anxiety and subsequent depression. School children preparing for the board exams face stress at an earlier age as they have to prove themselves in the exams. Apart from the school environment, various factors also add on to their stress. This study was planned to assess the Anxiety and Depression among School children appearing for their 10th standard Board Exams in rural and urban setup and comparison was done.

**METHODOLOGY:** School children (n=150) appearing for the Xth std Board Exams from rural and urban area were assessed for Anxiety and Depression using Hamilton Anxiety Scale and various other factors causing stress were assessed using Life Event Scale after obtaining the consent from their parents. Questionnaire also included their sociodemographic details

**RESULTS:** Anxiety was present in 60% of the rural students and 40% of the urban students. Depression was seen in 33% of the rural and 40% of the urban students. 81% of the girls in the rural area suffered from Anxiety and 46% of the girls in the urban area suffered from depression. There was no significant difference between boys in the rural and urban area. Insomnia was present in 24(32%) urban and 36 (48%) rural students and significantly associated with the anxiety due to board exams ( $p < .02$ )

**KEYWORDS :** anxiety, depression, school children

### INTRODUCTION:

With the introduction of new curriculum and increased competitive exams, children are facing increased pressure to succeed in examinations at increasingly earlier ages. It is therefore necessary to emphasize the need for greater awareness of the stress that may be experienced by young children and adolescents as a result of it and implement provisions for early interventions. Stress is often a trigger of anxiety and subsequent depression.

Many students feel a certain level of pressure due to the expectations of their teachers and family. They want to please everyone, and do their best so as not to let anyone down. This high standard can exacerbate exam stress; if a student is working towards a degree or some other goal, doing well on an exam could be essential. Students in those situations believe themselves to be competing with their classmates, further heightening the pressure.

A certain portion of exam stress can come from within the student themselves. The pressure to do well does not just come from within the school and family environments; if the student is afraid of perceived failure, a bad grade on an exam may be the realization of their greatest fear. If they dwell on the exam's difficulty, and worrying about their grade, they will almost certainly feel more stressed. Exam stress is an unfortunate part of life for many in school. Students getting ready for exams often feel a lot of pressure, which can result in nervousness and anxiety. While a small amount of pressure or stress can be motivational, if left untreated, exam stress can interfere in a person's day-to-day functioning.

Anxiety is one of the most common psychological disorders in school-aged children and adolescents worldwide. It is associated with substantial negative effects on children's social, emotional and academic success.

In India, the main cause of anxiety is parents' high educational expectations and pressure for academic achievement. This is amplified during the 10<sup>th</sup> Standard Board Exams as the results are vital for the students and are the main determining criteria for future admission to a high quality senior secondary school and a preferred academic stream. There is fierce competition among students since the number of places in these educational institutions is fewer than the number of students.

Depression in the student population has been shown to be associated with increased risk of suicidal behaviour, homicidal ideation, tobacco use and other substance abuse into adulthood. As anxiety and depression are now increasingly common among student population who are facing exam results, it was thought appropriate to conduct a study to find the prevalence of these two major psychiatric issues

among these students as it will serve as a guideline to initiate appropriate measures as there are only limited studies being done in India. The study is aimed to assess the anxiety and depression level that a normal student experiences when he/she is in the verge of facing school examination and comparing the respective levels between students from urban and rural population.

### METHODOLOGY:

**Study design :** Cross sectional study.

**Study period :** 3 months (August 2018- October 2018)

### Study population:

150 (75 from the rural and 75 from urban) students appearing for the Xth std Board Exams were selected randomly from Tiruvallur district after obtaining the permission from school authorities and from the parents. They were administered the questionnaire in person assuring confidentiality.

### Inclusion Criteria:

- Students appearing for the Board Exams for the first time
- Students who are willing to participate

### Exclusion Criteria:

- Students who are on any other treatment
- Students not appearing for the first time

Apart from the forthcoming exams, other factors that contributed to the stress and the relation of anxiety or depression to each of these factors were also assessed. The parameters which were assessed included:

- Socioeconomic status.
- Change of school.
- Change of health condition.
- Death among relatives and friends
- Presence of insomnia.
- Presence of fear.

Ethical clearance and permission obtained from local health authorities prior to the study. Data obtained were analysed for the proportion and significance using SPSS Software.

### RESULTS:

- Anxiety was present in 60% of the rural students and 40% of the urban students
- Depression was seen in 33% of the rural and 40% of the urban students
- 14 of the 36 urban male students and 19 of the 43 rural male students reported anxiety. There was no significant difference. Among females, 16 of the 39 urban students and 26 of the 32 rural

students were anxious. The high prevalence of anxiety among the rural girls (81%) was found to be statistically significant ( $p < 0.03$ ).

**Table 1: Gender Distribution Of Study Population**

	URBAN	RURAL
MALES	36	43
FEMALES	39	32

- 12 of the 36 urban male students and 14 of the 43 rural male students felt depressed. Among females, 18 of the 39 urban students and 11 of the 32 rural girls reported depression. No statistical difference was found.

**Table 2: Factors causing anxiety and depression**

FACTORS	ANXIETY		DEPRESSION	
	URBAN	RURAL	URBAN	RURAL
<b>SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS</b>				
UPPER CLASS	20%	--	40%	-
UPPER MIDDLE CLASS	39%	66%	46%	33%
LOWER MIDDLE CLASS	41%	83%	36%	56%
LOWER CLASS	66%	48%	33%	25%
<b>GENDER</b>				
MALES	14%	19%	12%	14%
FEMALES	16%	26%	18%	11%
<b>DEATH OF FAMILY MEMBER</b>				
YES	85%	66%	71%	80%
NO	47%	60%	51%	74%
<b>ILLNESS OR INJURY</b>				
YES	44%	66%	50%	33%
NO	32%	58%	40%	35%
<b>CHANGE OF SCHOOL</b>				
YES	66%	35%	74%	14%
NO	31%	65%	48%	39%

- 66% of the urban students belonging to lower class and 83% of the rural students belonging to middle class families experience more stress signifying the importance of socio economic factor influencing students
- Stress following the death of family members causes anxiety and depression among rural and urban students equally (70-80%)
- Change of school causes stress more among the urban students (66% and 74%) than rural students which suggests the fact that school environment is a significant factor influencing students.
- Insomnia was present in 24(32%) urban and 36 (48%) rural students and significantly associated with the anxiety due to board exams
- Somatic problems were present in 33(44%) urban and 21(28%) rural students. No significant association was found

**DISCUSSION:**

Anxiety is present in 60% of the rural students and 40% of the urban students. Depression was found in 33% of the rural and 40% of the urban students. The study shows anxiety among girls especially from the rural school probably they might be facing the extra burden in the household works attributing to the pressure resulting in anxiety. Huan *et al.* (2008) studies on gender differential effect on stress revealed that the girls experience more stress compared to males. Insomnia is a symptom that is frequently associated with anxiety and found to be significantly associated with the exam stress in this study.

66% of the urban students belonging to lower class and 83% of the rural students belonging to middle class families experience more stress signifying the importance of socio economic factor influencing students. Seong (2002) found a positive relationship between academic achievement of the pupil's and parental education, income and occupation. Socio-economic background of the pupils influences the academic achievement. Dr. Yatendrakumar S Pal (2009) studies on socio-economic status and stress revealed that the adolescents with lower socio-economic status experienced more stress as compared to the adolescents with higher socio-economic status. Stress following the death of family members causes anxiety and depression among rural and urban students equally. Change of school causes stress more among the urban students than rural students which suggests the fact that school environment is a significant factor influencing students.

**CONCLUSION:**

Anxiety and depression can be prevented at an early stage itself by;

**1. Raising Awareness**

Anxiety and depression are now a days more prevalent which can be prevented in the school environment itself by introducing a curriculum which should be oriented towards developing self confidence among students.

**2. Parental Involvement**

Parents should take time in combating stress among their kids by spending quality time with them.

**3. School counselors:**

This concept of school counselors have to be established in India to overcome peer pressure and academic stress.

**Conflict of Interest:** NIL

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