

Existential Crisis amongst Youth: A Comparative Perspective

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Abstract: Existential crisis is a stage of development at which an individual questions the very foundation of his or her life; whether the life has any meaning, purpose or value. Demographers referred to the present youth as Generation 'Y' and further stated that they are the ones who experience loneliness, alienation, and stress most of the times. It has been found that youth are engulfed by the crisis of existentialism and the unpredictability of future. Therefore, the present study was undertaken to identify the areas responsible for existential crisis amongst youth today. The sample of this study consisted of 75 boys and 75 girls (Sample Size =150) in the age ranging from 16-20 years hailing from the Delhi region on basis of Incidental-Cum-Purposive Sampling technique. Youth Problem Inventory was used to measure the areas of existential crisis. The findings indicate that among the three areas namely- Family, Personal and Social; the Family plays a major role in the development of existential crisis amongst youth followed by the Social area and then the Personal area. Study also revealed that relative gender difference was present in existential crisis amongst the youth.

Keywords: Existential Crisis, Youth

I. Introduction

“When life is a woe
And hope is dumb,
The world says, “Go!”
The Grave says, “Come!”

Arthur Guiterman

Considering the fast pace at which the man of today is progressing, the above lines sums up our existence in nutshell. Most people live their lives in a materialistic world that satisfies their immediate needs, fulfill their fantasies, and promises them the fulfillment of the instant gratification of their need, but in later life, they experience **Existential Crisis** which is a stage of development at which an individual questions the very foundations of his or her life; whether his life has any meaning, purpose or value. It may result from the sense of being alone and isolated in the world, a new found grasp or appreciation of one's mortality, believing that one's life has no real purpose or meaning and awareness of freedom. This existential crisis is often caused by a shocking event in a person's life - marriage, separation, major loss in business, the death of loved one, a life threatening problem, psycho-active drug use, adult children leaving home etc.

MODERN YOUTH: ENGULFED IN CRISIS FOR EXSISTENTIALISM

Existentialist philosopher **Soren Kierkegaard** of the 19th century talked about existential crisis as a mid life phenomenon, but, sadly in the world of today it is often experienced by the youth. Demographers born between 1979 & 1994 referred to the present youth as Generation 'Y' and

further stated that they are the ones who experience loneliness, alienation, and stress most of the times (McCombs, 2001).

Brendtro (1999); Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern (1992); Wheatley (1999) noted that today's youth feel disconnected and question their existence, purpose, and the meaning of life. A survey conducted by Colorado (Denver Rocky Mountain News 1998) reported that 99% of the students surveyed craved for respect, attention and care from adults finding themselves struggling for existence.

The existential crisis of the Generation Y is due to their stress of dealing with various issues involving their educational institution (e.g., homework, grades, violence/ bullying, ragging), family (e.g., fear of losing parents, broken families, worry over health issues), peers (e.g., bullies, gangs, uncooperative, mean, hedonistic, fickle friends, vicious teasing, informal initiations into codes of conduct), the world (e.g., scarcity of safe air, food & water, global warming, crime, terrorism, nuclear war), and the future (e.g. college, jobs). In fact, the youth today are facing a traumatic societal, familial and cultural shift. They are eye witnesses to maladjustments in the family (peer non-acceptance issues, comparison amongst siblings), broken and wrecked relationships, betrayals, unemployment, cutthroat competition, apprehensions about their unknown and uncertain future and inability to achieve the desired success. They also witness hopelessness, worthlessness, helplessness; immense cognitive dissonance, heightened mental conflict, craving for basic needs of love, affection and sexual fulfillment, inter-generational conflict and castigation by society

The modern youth is experiencing issues of underdeveloped self concept, extreme casual attitude and trust versus mistrust dilemma. **Carl Jung** reported in his book *Modern Man in search of a Soul* that about a third of his cases had suffered from no clinically define-able neurosis, but from the senselessness and emptiness of their lives which he described as the general neurosis of his time.

Karl Marx talked of **alienation** - an individual's estrangement not from or their traditional community and others in general but their 'human nature'. Many people think that the atomism of modern society means that individual have shallower relations with other people than they would have normally. Man being a social animal has now started experiencing **Anomie** i.e. a personal feeling of a lack of social norms and values or normlessness. The famous French sociologist **Emile Durkheim** mentioned this concept describing generally a mismatch between personal or group standards and wider social standards, or from the lack of a social ethic, which further produces moral deregulation and an absence of legitimate aspirations.

Some recent authors have written of "**the imposter phenomenon**", describing the feeling of many apparently successful people that their success is undeserved and that one day people will unmask them for the frauds they are. Famous psychologist **Maslow** held the view that people usually are ignorant of their own needs and try to live up to a cultural pattern and therefore 'normalcy' is the kind of sickness or crippling that everyone shares with everybody else and therefore doesn't notice. On similar lines, **Rollo May (1909-94)** an existential psychologist also focused on the difficult aspects of human condition like loneliness, anxiety, alienation.

As per the **United Nations World Youth Report 2003**, "Youth can be characterized as a transition from childhood to adulthood – a developmental journey during which one gains independence and begins to participate fully in society. This period is fraught with enormous challenges for young people themselves and for the rest of society. It is imperative that societies invest in their youth, as they are especially vulnerable to the increasingly complex problems facing the world today."

Objectives of the Study

1. To compare the influence of family, social and personal area in development of existential crisis amongst youth.
2. To examine the gender differences in existential crisis amongst youth.

Hypothesis

1. Family area plays a major role in development of existential crisis amongst youth followed by personal and social area.
2. Girls are more prone to existential crisis when compared with boys.

II. Methodology

Sample:

The study was conducted on 150 adolescent (75 boys and 75 girls) of Delhi region selected on the basis of Incidental-Cum-Purposive Sampling Method. Their age ranges from 16 – 18 years and were students of class XI –XII from different schools.

Tool:

Youth Problem Inventory (YPI) of Verma M. was used for the collection of data. The YPI is a self administering inventory for the students of 16 to 20 yrs of age to locate the problems in four areas – Family, School, Social & Personal, and other sub-areas under each main area. The scale can be conveniently used in its full form as well as in its partial form that is only for a particular area. Here researchers have used three areas namely Family, Social and Personal to meet the purpose of study. Each of the area has different items. Family area comprises of 31 items, Social area has 05 items and Personal area has 24 items. All items in total have three alternative responses. The subjects are required to put a tick mark on any of the three alternatives given for each item of the scale. As it is a power test so there is no time limit. On an average subject takes approximately 5 minutes to complete the test of given area. There is scoring key in the manual of YPI on the basis of which scoring is done. A high score in an area indicate high problem in that particular area. Reliability of YPI is found to be .80, whereas validity is in the range of .68 - .75.

III. Result & Discussion

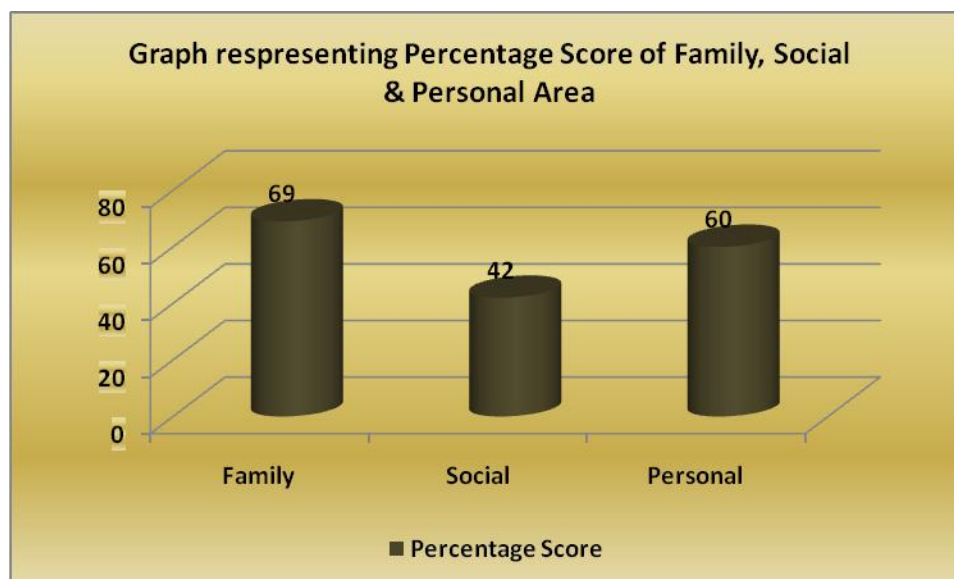
The result of the study was analyzed by using the manual of Youth Problem Inventory. As each of the three areas has different items and each area has a different maximum possible score so in order to make the scores of the entire three areas equivalent obtained scores were converted into percentage so that each score were represented. The treatment of data was done on the basis of converted scores. The result table has been prepared accordingly. The discussion of each hypothesis is based upon table I & II respectively followed by the graph.

Hypothesis -1: Family area plays a major role in development of existential crisis amongst youth followed by personal and social area.

Table No. 1: Comparing scores of the three areas

Areas	N	No. of item	Maximum possible score	Obtained Score	Percentage Score
Family	150	31	62*150	7780	69%
Social	150	05	10*150	630	42%
Personal	150	24	48*150	4308	60%

Fig. no. 1



According to hypothesis no. 1 “Family area plays a major role in development of existential crisis amongst youth followed by personal and social area”. This is clear from the above data presented in table I, that out of the three areas –: family, social and personal. Family plays a major role in development of existential crisis among youth. When the researcher compared the response of 150 youth in the respective areas it was revealed that score on family area was much higher than the score on other two areas this finding goes with the framed hypothesis because as mentioned earlier a high score in an area indicate high problem in that particular area. To have a clearer picture of the problematic area obtained scores of all the three areas were compared. The maximum possible score for any of the respondent in family area is 62, in this area 150 youth obtained a score of 7780 which was converted into percentage which came out to be 69%, in second area i.e. social the maximum possible score for any respondent is 10, in this area 150 youth obtained a score of 630 which when converted into percentage came out to be 42% i.e. low than the score of family area. The third area is of personal area in which the maximum possible score of any of the respondent is 48, in this area 150 youth obtained a score of 4308 which accounts to be 60%, indicating that this area is ahead of social area. When compared the percentage score of all the three areas together following arrangements came out: family area topped the chart in development of existential crisis with a score of 69%, followed by the personal area with a score of 60% and finally at third place is social area with a score of 42%. A summarization of this score is presented graphically in figure no. 1. Thus the present finding supports the hypothesis that family area plays a major role in development of existential crisis amongst youth followed by personal and social area.

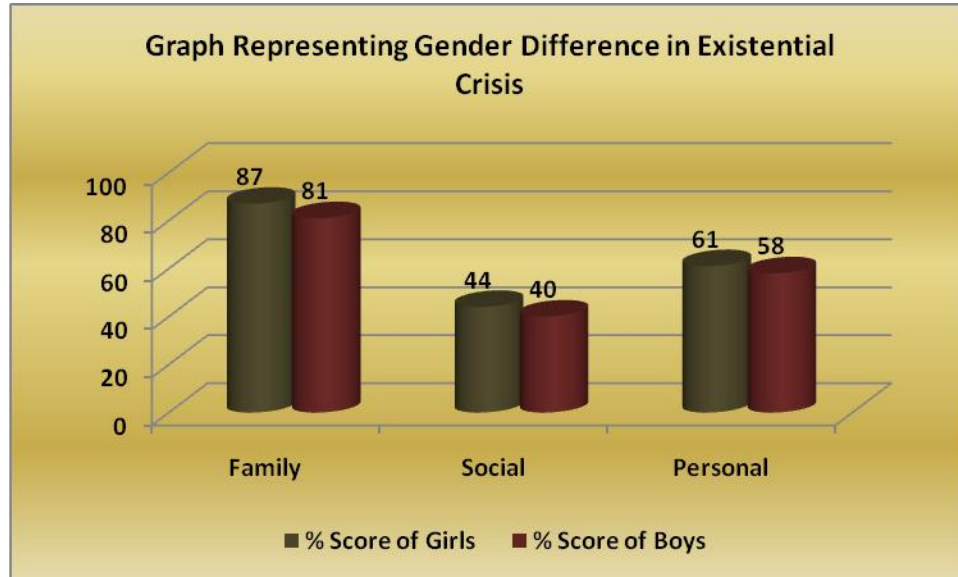
Hypothesis – 2: Girls are more prone to existential crisis when compared with boys.

Table No. II: Gender Comparison of the Obtained Scores

Area	N	Obtained Scores of Girls	Obtained Scores of Boys	% score of Girls	% score of Boys
Family	75	4036	3744	87	81

Social	75	328	302	44	40
Personal	75	2208	2100	61	58

Fig. no. 2



According to hypothesis no. 2 “Girls are more prone to existential crisis when compared with boys”. This points to the assumption that Girls had more problems in all the three areas namely – family, social and personal as compared with boys. The table no II suggest that in all the three area obtained scores of girls is more than that of boys. When the researcher compared the response of 75 girls and 75 boys respectively in the three areas it was revealed that score of girls were more than the scores of boys, this finding goes with the framed hypothesis because as mentioned earlier a high score in an area indicate high problem in that particular area. To have a clearer picture the obtained scores of girls and boys were compared on each of the area. The maximum possible score for any of the respondent in family area is 62, in this area 75 girls obtained a score of 4036 which was converted into percentage which came out to be 87%, the obtained score of boys were 3744 which was 81%, thus the scores of girls is higher than that of boys. In second area i.e. social the maximum possible score for any respondent is 10, in this area 75 girls obtained a score of 328 which when converted into percentage came out to be 44% and the obtained score of boys is 302 which is 40% i.e. low than the score of girls. The third area is of personal area in which the maximum possible score of any of the respondent is 48, in this area girls obtained a score of 2208 which accounts to be 61% whereas boys obtained a score of 2100 which is 58% indicating that in this area also girls are ahead of boys. When the percentage score of all the three areas were compared girls obtained a high score on all the areas when compared with boys. The findings is summarised graphically in the figure no. 2. Thus the present finding supports the hypothesis that Girls are more prone to existential crisis when compared with boys.

IV. References

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