

## Personality and Test Anxiety of School Students

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### Abstract:

Present-day students experience a cut-throat competition at all levels of education. They have been sensitized well in home and school to excel at all academic pursuits. Further, Teachers as well as parents exert their own influence on the academics of students. In these circumstances, students generally become anxious and unable to perform up to their fullest potential. It is understood from researches that 'test anxiety' is an important construct which influence the academic success of a student. Personality being the dynamic organization, not only determine the nature of our general behaviour but also our behaviour at each and every places which ultimately would aid in dealing with test anxiety. The present study tries to explore the relationship between test anxiety and personality of school students since it is a crucial stage. 128 students from ninth standard in Salem educational district were selected through stratified random sampling and the data was collected through survey. Fried-Ben test anxiety scale and Big five locator were utilized for collecting data. Results revealed that the negative emotionality dimension of personality is significantly correlated with all the dimensions of test anxiety and some significant inverse correlations are found between the rest of personality factors and test anxiety. It is also found that students differ in their test anxiety on the basis of gender and type of family they belong to. It is suggested from the findings that the school authorities and psychologists should consider these relationships and differences while alleviating test anxiety among school students.

**Keywords:** Test Anxiety, Big Five Personality Factors, School Students.

### I. BACKGROUND

The relationship between performance and anxiety is apparent in research grounds and has several negative impacts on individuals. Throughout the life span, individuals experience a wide range of competitive environments which make them stressful and anxious. When success or failure in any event is perceived as a crucial one, the performance is conveyed by anxiety. The sense of being watched by the world before, during and after performing makes individuals more aware of their own behaviour and debilitates the performance. This phenomenon of arousal led poor performance can be widely seen in academic settings where tests are principal evaluative methods to select and classify students' based on their performance. However, socially constructed values towards testing process and results exert pressure on students and so, Zoller & Ben-chain (1990) stated that the contemporary world as the age of test conscious in which the lives of many people are greatly influenced and are also equally judged by their test performance.

The perception of high stakes tests as threatening and visualizing the consequences of achieving low scores or failing, develops an agonized arousal in many students. Such a worry and heightened arousal has been demonstrated to impair the test performance of students. This condition is collectively called as test anxiety in psychology literature. Sieber, O'Neil & Tobias (1977) defined this condition as "a set of physiological, phenomenological and behavioural responses that accompany concern over possible negative consequences or failure in an exam or similar evaluative situations". This definition has possibilities to be agreed upon and considered by the majority of researchers since it simply

states that test anxiety is nothing more than an ideal psychological construct. However, social and educational perspectives have labeled test anxiety as a crisis prevailing among students. Thus, research in test anxiety is a complicated task and equally a promising one which helps to explore and predict the behavioural well-being of students (Zeidner, 1998).

Test anxiety is considered to be a perfect vehicle to explore the roots of anxiety there by predicting the behaviour of individuals which has been studied since 1950's and researchers have been investigating the nature, components, origins, determinants, effects, and treatments of test anxiety and proposed promising models (Zeidner, 1998). Worry and emotionality are considered to be the major distinct factors of test anxiety (Liebert & Morris 1967) but while measuring the construct, researchers tried to conceptualize these factors in various contextual responses. Friedman and Bendas Jacob (1997) proposed three dimensions of test anxiety such as social derogation, cognitive obstruction and tenseness. Social derogation refers to the worries of being socially belittled and deprecated by significant others following failure on a test where as cognitive obstruction indicates a poor concentration, failure to recall, difficulties in effective problem solving, before or during a test and tenseness reflects to the bodily and emotional discomfort.

Existing literature in test anxiety research revealed that the parental pressure, achievement motivation, emotional intelligence etc. are some of the factors determining the construct (Chen, 2012; Rouhani, 2008; Peleg-Pepko, 2002). Among all these, Individuals' personality is considered to be

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a major factor, being a dynamic organization, it determines the behaviour of individuals in general as well as specific situations. According to Braden (1995), the three educational applications of personality research are (i) studying the impact of normal variation in personality on academic outcomes, (ii) studying the abnormality and exceptionality that facilitate devising diagnostic tools to identify students of dysfunctional personality and (iii) developing intervention programs and formulating instructional design to deal with the needs of such students. Thus, the self-defeating tendency of students suffering from test anxiety can be predicted and managed by studying their personality.

Identifying an appropriate model to explore test anxiety of students in relation to their personality is a critical task. Personality models developed on the basis of distinctive factors can be suitable for test anxiety research and such a model needs to be providing grounds for analyzing and alleviating test anxiety with respect to personality factors. Chamorro-Premuzic et al (2008) stated that test anxiety among students can be well explored for their dispositional nature and personality determinants with use of Big Five Factors. The big five factor theory is considered to be the most prominent to explore the personality of students in academic settings (O'Connor & Paunonen, 2007). Ozer and Benet-Martinez (2005) also revealed that psychological researches aiming the student population should consider the big five traits since it has been associated to an extensive array of behaviours. Hence, big five factors of personality is considered to correlate with test anxiety among students in the present study.

Additionally, it is imperative to consider socio-demographic variables in exploring test anxiety among students. Socio-demographic variables are situational or external determinants that are responsible for pre-dispositional development of test anxiety. Costello et al (2003) demonstrated that socio-demographic factors play a vital role in determining the test anxiety of students. Research literature in test anxiety with special reference to Indian context (Sud, A., & Katoch, S. 1994; Verma, S., Sharma, D., & Larson, R. W. 2002) revealed important information about the crucial role of socio-demographic variables such as gender and type of family in the development of test anxiety.

Test anxiety is deemed to be one of the widely and deeply explored construct in the field of educational psychology in the west but the present-day test anxiety research in India needs to primarily include its contextual correlates. Hence, the present study intends to identify the relationship of perceived test anxiety among students with their big five factors of personality. Also, attempt is made to find out the differences in perceived test anxiety and big five factors among students on the basis of their gender and type of family. The following hypotheses are framed in order to accomplish the above mentioned objectives.

**Hypotheses**

1. There is a significant difference between male and female students in their test anxiety.
2. There is a significant difference in test anxiety of students from nuclear and joint families.
3. Male and female students differ significantly in their big five personality factors.

4. Students from nuclear and joint families differ significantly in their personality factors.
5. There is a significant relationship between big five personality factors and test anxiety of school students.

**II. RESEARCH METHOD**

The study adopted normative survey which is explorative and associative in nature. The sample consists of 133 students studying ninth standard from two different schools of Salem educational district, Tamilnadu were selected through stratified random sampling. The Fried-Ben Test Anxiety Scale (Friedman & Bendas Jacob, 1997) was used to measure test anxiety. It is a 23-item self-report scale on six point rating. The Big five locator (Howard, Medina & Howard, 1996) was used to explore the personality of the students. It is a 25 item self-report scale on five point rating on the continuum of traits.

The management of the schools and students were clearly informed about the study and acceptance of participation is sought. After the approval, the questionnaires were provided along with the instructions for answering. Due to the incompleteness of the responses, data of 5 students were not included and data drawn from the remaining 128 students (Male-64 & Female-64) were included in the study. The data were analyzed and interpreted with the help of independent sample 't' test and Pearson's correlation.

**III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Table - 1:** Test anxiety of students on the basis of Gender and Type of Family

Dimensions of Test anxiety	Mean (S.D)		't' Value	Mean (S.D)		't' Value
	Male (64)	Female (64)		Nuclear Family (88)	Joint Family (40)	
Social Derogation	26.39 (8.04)	32.08 (8.10)	3.984*	38.16 (8.19)	30.20 (7.45)	5.452*
Cognitive Obstruction	24.45 (7.26)	33.13 (6.05)	7.356*	36.34 (6.23)	29.62 (7.60)	4.910*
Tenseness	17.59 (4.45)	24.51 (5.64)	7.688*	29.55 (5.14)	22.95 (4.77)	7.096*

\* Significant at 0.05 level

From Table-1, it is observed that the 't' values are significant for all the dimensions of test anxiety with respect to students' gender and type of family they belong to. Hence the hypothesis -1 and 2 are accepted. It is concluded that male and female students differ significantly in their test anxiety. The females have shown significantly higher score in all the dimensions of test anxiety. Literature in gender psychology stated that the females have anxiety prone nature than males. In Tamilnadu, especially in the public examinations females outperform males for the past ten years and the expectations placed on females become very high. Moreover, the notorious districts as well as state rankings are mostly obtained by females. Such rank holders are taken as models and as a result in the successive batches female students are pressurized by family, teachers and friends to do well in examinations. These kind of increased pressure and internal

motivation combined with pathological personality traits lead to poor study skills and many resulted in test anxiety among female students.

Further it is noticed from the table that there is a significant difference in test anxiety dimensions of students with respect to the students' type of family. Hence the hypothesis - 2 is accepted. It is inferred from the table that students belonging to nuclear family possess higher test anxiety than those belonging to joint family. Generally in joint families, children get proper guidelines as well as emotional care from the elders which would enable them to manage their anxiety without affecting performance. Researches proved that children in nuclear family system are more prone for development of anxiety than in joint family system (Kumar, 2011).

**Table - 2: Big Five Personality Factors of students on the basis of Gender and Type of Family**

Big Five Personality Factors	Mean (S.D)		't' Value	Mean (S.D)		't' Value
	Male (64)	Female (64)		Nuclear Family (88)	Joint Family (40)	
Negative Emotionality	48.78 (11.14)	56.09 (11.07)	3.725*	58.50 (11.60)	49.10 (11.61)	4.253*
Extraversion	48.09 (6.16)	51.59 (7.43)	2.899*	49.07 (7.20)	58.35 (6.69)	6.603*
Openness to experience	52.84 (7.47)	55.59 (9.19)	1.857N.S	51.68 (8.66)	57.40 (7.98)	3.666*
Agreeableness	47.44 (9.79)	49.88 (8.10)	1.535 <sup>ns</sup>	48.34 (8.25)	52.35 (10.64)	1.610 <sup>ns</sup>
Conscientiousness	48.25 (6.91)	51.56 (6.96)	2.703*	50.75 (7.31)	55.25 (6.71)	3.410*

\* Significant at 0.05 level; N.S - Not Significant

From Table-2, it is observed that the 't' values are significant for the personality factors except openness to experience and agreeableness with respect to gender. Hence the hypothesis - 3 is accepted. It is concluded that male and female students differ significantly in their big five personality factors. It is noticed from the table that females have displayed significantly higher tendencies in negative emotionality, extraversion and conscientiousness. Females have displayed higher negative emotionality than males. Negative emotionality is viewed as a temperament involves neuroticism, anxiety, worry and feeling of gloomy. Females in our society are still suppressed in many aspects, which always result in negative emotionality. Further in today's world, females came openly for the social participations which would provide wider opportunity to develop extraversion tendencies. Above all, females are expected socially to control their impulses which would facilitate their task and goal-directed behaviour in turn enhanced their conscientiousness. Socialization tendency of females and their moral values are the reasons for such high extraversion and meticulousness.

Also it is observed from the table that except in agreeableness, students differ in their personality factors with respect to their family type. Hence the hypothesis - 4 is accepted. Children from nuclear family have displayed higher negative emotionality whereas children from joint family have displayed higher extraversion, openness to experience and conscientiousness tendencies. Children of joint family system are raised with the opportunities of socializing, admittance to new experiences and firm moral values (Ali et. al, 2012; Bahadur & Dhawan, 2008). Sovani et al., (2000) indicated that the family involvement has increased the students' attitude towards educations, aspirations and academic outcomes. This is vividly seen in the higher tendencies of children from joint family system.

**Table - 3: Correlations between Big five factors and Test Anxiety**

	Social Derogation	Cognitive Obstruction	Tenseness
Negative Emotionality	0.236*	0.229*	0.184*
Extraversion	- 0.039	- 0.134	- 0.032
Openness to experience	- 0.028	- 0.092	- 0.196*
Agreeableness	- 0.219*	- 0.130	- 0.208*
Conscientiousness	- 0.083	- 0.202*	- 0.188*

\*Significant at 0.05 level

From Table-3, it is observed that there is a significant relationship exists between the big five personality factors and test anxiety of school students. Hence the hypothesis - 5 is accepted. It is concluded that the big five personality factors of school students is significantly related to their test anxiety. It is noticed from table that the negative emotionality is positively related with all the dimensions of test anxiety. Negative emotionality is a trait which indicates the emotional instability, emotional management and lack of self-empowerment. When individual possess these tendencies obviously they have poor self-image and develop negative self-concept. As a result, they develop a lot of suspicion tendencies in turn test anxiety.

The extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness factors of personality have a significant negative association with the components of test anxiety. Extraversion tendency includes sociability, assertiveness and positive emotionality which cannot go hand in hand with test anxiety. Openness to experiences always helps an individual to approach a task rather than avoiding it. Agreeableness reflects tendencies like philanthropy, reliance and modesty which absolutely help individuals to overcome their anxiety. Conscientiousness helps an individual to follow norms and rules and also aid in planning, organizing and prioritizing tasks (Costa & McCrae, 1992; John, 1990; Tellegen, 1985). Hence, the negative association of these four factors of personality with test anxiety is quite logical.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Test anxiety is a major factor which impacts academic performance. Previous researches in the field of test anxiety indicated the importance of exploring the distal antecedent factors and proximal personal consequences of test anxiety. From findings of this study, it is found that the female students have higher test anxiety than male students and also

students belonging to nuclear family have high test anxiety. The personality and test anxiety of students is positively correlated with negative emotionality and negatively with openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness factors. Students with negative emotionality and high test anxiety are more prone to debilitated performance resulting in co-morbid psychosocial burdens and self destructing behaviours. The teachers, administrators, counsellors and parents should consider this factor and take initiations to alleviate test anxiety among female students and children from nuclear family. It is the bound duty of school administration to appoint counsellors to address worrying issue of test anxiety by providing suitable interventions. The school psychologists should consider these differences while planning personality development programmes with special need to ameliorate test anxiety among school students. It is a right time for the policy makers and curriculum planners in school education to incorporate the programmes on coping mechanisms as an important module in school curriculum and to appoint school psychologists for planning and executing appropriate personality development programmes which modifies not only the test anxiety of students but also their overall personality. Furthermore, it is suggested that the future directions of the present study include (i) in-depth analysis of interaction between big five factors and test anxiety dimensions using complex predictive, factorial and path analytic designs, (ii) Developing an educational cum intervention program for alleviating test anxiety via manipulating the big five factors of personality and testing its efficacy, and (iii) identification of other latent dimensions of test anxiety and testing their relationship with big five factors in order to propose a newfangled measurement model.

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