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A STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF ANXIETY ON THE SELF- CONCEPT AND SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT OF STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN VARIOUS COMPETITIVE EXAMS

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ABSTRACT:

Education holds immense importance in human life. It is the comprehensive manifestation of the best powers inherent in the body, mind, and soul of a person. Education is an essential feature of any modern, civilized, advanced, developed society, and without it, progress can never be complete or multidimensional. Students often face various anxieties related to exams in their lives. The presented research paper is based on the title, "A Study on the Impact of Anxiety on the Self-Concept and Social Adjustment of Students Participating in Various Competitive Examinations." According to Freud, anxiety is an emotional and distressing state that alerts the ego to potential threats, enabling it to respond appropriately to the environment. For this study, boys and girls from coaching institutes in Meerut, preparing for different competitive exams, have been selected.

KEYWORDS: Anxiety, Coaching Institutes, Boys and Girls, Self-Concept, Social Adjustment

INTRODUCTION:

In the current scenario, humans are affected by various forms of anxiety. It not only harms the human mind but also affects the body. Anxiety stems from feelings of depression, despair, and sorrow. Student life is not immune to these anxieties. Spielberger (1972) mentions that "anxiety is a state of arousal that arises due to the need to avoid fear." Students, too, face numerous anxieties related to exams throughout their academic lives. Students face various anxieties related to exams. The researcher, based on exam-related anxiety in 49 tests, conducted a study titled "A Study on the Impact of Anxiety on the Self-Concept and Social Adjustment of Students Participating in Various Competitive Examinations." Anxiety is a natural and generally short-term response to a stressful situation, often associated with feelings of nervousness or apprehension. It typically occurs in several unfamiliar or challenging situations where the individual may feel incapable of performing the task, or where the outcome is uncertain.

According to Freud: "Anxiety is an emotional and distressing state that alerts the ego to potential dangers so that it can behave in harmony with the environment." Humans are social beings because they are born and raised in a social and physical environment. The balance or harmony between the expectations of the environment and a person's efforts to meet these expectations is crucial for leading a successful life. Social adjustment is the process by which an individual aligns with their surroundings. The extent to which a person adjusts themselves is key to their social adjustment. The scope of the social environment begins with one's home and family and extends to the boundaries of global fraternity.¬¬ Today, we are living in a scientific era where social and economic knowledge is evident all around us. As a result, there is no aspect of human life that remains unaffected by the wonders of science. Progress happens gradually through the application of practical knowledge, which enhances our comfort and conveniences. We undertake any task with a specific goal or purpose in mind; without a purpose, no action holds any meaning. Similarly, for a researcher, it is essential to understand the purpose of research in order to complete it successfully. Any task or problem cannot reach its goal without clearly defining its objective. The present researcher has studied the impact of anxiety on the self-concept and social adjustment of students participating in various competitive examinations. The term "anxiety" originates from the Latin word "anxious," which means agitation and fear.

Educational anxiety refers to the state of stress that a child experiences when they are unable to progress in their education as desired. This stress can persist for a long time, which is why it is termed educational anxiety. In other words, anxiety is a mental disorder in which an individual remains apprehensive about the future and becomes engulfed in negativity. Anxiety is a subjective process that arises to cope with a stressful situation. In modern times, the continuous social, economic, and cultural changes lead individuals to feel overwhelmed by various problems and stress. From an educational perspective, today's adolescents often feel stressed due to various demands in their lives. During this transitional phase, these teenagers find it difficult to share their thoughts and may not even want to do so. Stanley Hall has noted that "adolescence is a time of struggle and storm." This turmoil affects adolescents both internally and externally.

Numerous problems surround teenagers, and these issues often become persistent, manifesting as educational anxiety. On one hand, they face changes in their internal structure, and on the other, they struggle to establish their identity in society. The desire to assert their identity motivates them to work hard. Most parents also want their children to secure a good position in class or competitive exams, leading them to place excessive pressure on their children. When a child fails to meet these expectations, they often cannot cope and fall into anxiety. In today's world, ambitions are limitless, but when a child encounters stressful situations, it adversely affects their educational performance and learning capacity. The term "anxiety" was first used in psychology by Freud.

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The word "examination" brings a lot of fear and stress for a student. It holds different meanings for different individuals. Exam-related stress is not a new phenomenon for students of any age group. From nursery students to those preparing for various competitive exams, students experience exam-related stress at least once during their academic years. Some may think that average-performing students may experience anxiety before or during an exam, and this does not necessarily reflect their abilities. It is a common emotional experience that any student can face. In fact, many psychologists argue that feeling nervous before an exam can be positively motivating and can help students perform better. However, if a student experiences excessive anxiety before or during an exam, it can adversely affect their performance. Thus, experiencing significant worry and anxiety before or during an exam is considered a psychological condition known as "test anxiety."

A student may experience exam anxiety for several important reasons. Experts claim that even with proper exam preparation, a student can still experience anxiety, which can lead to serious mental health issues like stress disorders. Before delving into the details, let's understand what exam anxiety is. The American Psychological Association (APA) defines exam anxiety as performance anxiety. According to them, people experience exam anxiety in situations where performance plays a crucial role. Individuals often feel nervous about the possibility of failing to perform their best when needed.

Exam anxiety includes both physical symptoms and emotional responses, though the symptoms can vary from person to person. When conducting research in the educational field, it is essential to justify the study's relevance, significance, and nature to demonstrate how the results and conclusions may impact the educational world. Additionally, this justification helps in establishing the significance of the educational problem being addressed. This research focuses on studying the impact of anxiety on the social adjustment of students participating in various competitive examinations. In the context of the problem, we see that humans adapt to their environment and circumstances to maintain their existence. It is not always necessary to achieve success in the adjustment process. This process involves two aspects: the needs and desires of the individual and the circumstances that influence these needs. These circumstances can exist both within and outside the individual. A child's personal adjustment is becoming increasingly problematic in today's busy and complex life. Everyone faces situations in life where they cannot immediately fulfil their needs and desires. If they manage to adapt in such situations, their balance remains intact; however, if they cannot cope, it leads to maladjustment, hindering the individual's development. Therefore, adaptation is essential for the holistic development of a person. Humans are social beings. In ancient times, societies were unaware of concepts like education and the development of a cooperative spirit. They recognized societal needs and placed importance on various roles. The current education system emphasizes both theoretical knowledge and practical skills, but nowadays, there is minimal focus on practical knowledge.

Today, students often perceive education as a burden, primarily motivated by the desire to earn money in the future. As a result, they tend to approach education solely for the purpose of preparing for competitive exams, leading them to fall victim to anxiety. This prevents them from effectively adjusting to their environment. The above description clearly indicates that students face strange situations due to anxiety about exam scores, concerns about their future, and family and social pressures. According to the National Crime Records Bureau report, the country has lost nearly 200,000 students in the last 25 years, from 1995 to the present, which is a significant loss for any nation. Investigating the reasons behind this reveals factors such as exam-related stress and a lack of self-confidence. Students participating in various competitive exams face the problem of understanding how exam anxiety affects their social adjustment and self-concept. Therefore, this research study is essential to address such questions and emphasize its relevance and importance.

Need and Importance of the Study:

Youth are the pillars of the nation, and their contribution is crucial for the development of any country. Generally, individuals aged between 15 to 35 years are considered part of the youth demographic, which is a vital and challenging phase of human development. During this period, individuals choose their professions for earning a livelihood. In a materialistic age, every young person strives to select a career that aligns with their abilities and potential to create a prosperous life. In this endeavour, some youths take up family businesses, while others must establish themselves in a competitive environment. After selecting a profession, the most important question revolves around preparation, which often involves hours of study supported by various coaching institutes for competitive exams. This leads to the onset of anxiety, and when the results of these exams do not meet their expectations, the level of their anxiety increases. As a result, they may become reclusive and withdraw from their social environment. This trend can escalate to the point of inducing suicidal thoughts. Thus, through this research, the following aspects will be explored:

1. The level of anxiety among students participating in various competitive exams.

2. Whether the level of anxiety affects the self-concept of students.

3. Whether the level of anxiety influences the social adjustment of students.

4. The specific factors of anxiety that contribute to the imbalance in students personalities.

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Causes:

The true purpose of education is to enhance an individual's intellectual knowledge, emotional sensitivity, and artistic exploration. Success plays a crucial role in life; it is a testament to hard work, dedication, commitment, capability, intelligence, and a positive attitude. Every person aspires to reach the pinnacle of achievement in their life. Over the past few decades, research has been conducted globally to understand the reasons behind successes and failures. Education is the foundation of human development. It is the only "ladder" through which an individual can reach their desired goals. Through education, a child's physical, mental, and spiritual abilities are developed. Mr. Adams described education as a multifaceted process, while D.V. defined it as a triadic process, emphasizing the roles of the teacher, the curriculum, and the student. Students are the future citizens of tomorrow, making it essential to provide them with quality education and a conducive environment. Education is the development of an individual's complete potential, enabling them to exert control over their environment and realize their possibilities. Koe and Koe (1954) defined education as "the process of individualization and socialization that promotes a person's utility and advancement within society." Education is the only means that can lift humanity from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge. It creates knowledge and transfers it from one generation to the next. An educated individual is empowered and can effectively utilize their skills and abilities throughout life. Historically, education was often teacher-centred. Today, we are in an era of learner-centred education, where it is recognized that education is a natural process that fosters the holistic development of a child's personality. The present study focuses on the anxiety experienced by students participating in various competitive exams and its impact on their self-concept and social adjustment. Adolescence and early youth are considered particularly sensitive periods regarding emotional and mental health. During these stages, many individuals develop symptoms of anxiety, with educational and exam-related stress being primary concerns. Exam anxiety is linked to negative experiences related to stress, where the inability to manage that stress becomes internalized. This anxiety includes negative physical, emotional, and behavioural responses to testing or evaluation, manifesting as symptoms such as increased heart rate, rapid breathing, and concerns about poor performance before, during, or after assessments.

Statement of Problem:

"A study of the impact of anxiety on the self-concept and social adjustment of students participating in various competitive exams."

Definition of Terms Used in the Study:

The study includes certain terms that require clarification:-

Student:

This category encompasses young men and women aged 16 to 30 who participate in various competitive exams. These students engage in exams such as JEE Mains, NEET, B.Ed., PCS, etc.

Anxiety:

Anxiety is a mental health issue characterized by excessive worry, restlessness, and fear, which makes it difficult for an individual to carry out everyday tasks. In the proposed study, anxiety refers to the state that occurs when a child is unable to make progress in their education as desired, leading to prolonged stress. In the current context, individuals are plagued by various types of anxiety. This anxiety often stems from depression, despair, and sadness. "Competitive exam anxiety" is a form of restlessness or stress that can disrupt or impair a test-taker's ability to think clearly and perform effectively during exams. Today's competitive era has created numerous challenges for children. To thrive in competition and achieve success, it is essential for individuals to maintain a balanced self-concept and be free from anxieties. It is sometimes observed that even the most successful individuals, despite being at the pinnacle of their achievements, take extreme and unnecessary steps, such as suicide. Why does this happen? This study aims to explore such questions. Anxiety is a mental health issue characterized by excessive worry, restlessness, and fear, making it difficult for individuals to manage their daily tasks. In stressful situations, cognitive problems arise, leading to thoughts like, "I am stupid," "I will fail," or "I will never be able to do this." Typically, they accept the worst possible outcomes for themselves. They feel they will disappoint everyone—parents, teachers, and themselves—and believe their future, reliant on grades, will be bleak. Students often behave as if a single poor exam will ruin their entire life, fearing that failure could result in being removed from their educational program. Such anxieties severely impact their self-confidence. According to Freud, "Anxiety is an emotional and distressing state that alerts the ego to a perceived threat, enabling it to respond appropriately to the environment." This perspective highlights how anxiety functions as a protective mechanism, preparing individuals to navigate challenges and potential dangers in their surroundings. It is alarming that, so far this year, 23 students have committed suicide in Kota. This is particularly concerning given that the number was 15 last year. This indicates that the fear of failure or the despair arising from not succeeding in competitive exams is leading to an increase in suicidal tendencies among students. There is a pressing need to conduct a thorough investigation into the underlying causes of this trend.

Self-Concept:

Self-concept is our self-image, shaped through various interactions with others throughout our lives. It is generally understood as our perceptions of our behaviour, abilities, and unique characteristics. Self-concept is a broad term that encompasses how an individual thinks about, evaluates, and understands themselves. Being aware of oneself means holding a concept of oneself, which is formed through experiences, interactions, and reflections, and plays a crucial role in influencing behaviour, emotions, and interpersonal relationships. A healthy self-concept promotes well-being, while a negative self-concept can lead to emotional and social challenges.

Allport defines self-concept as "that which we are immediately aware of. We consider it to be the central and personal domain of our lives; thus, it is a significant part of our consciousness, our identity, and our organization. In this way, it is the center of our lives." According to Harlock, "Self-concept consists of the images that an individual holds about themselves." These definitions highlight the importance of self-concept in shaping one's identity and understanding of oneself in relation to the world. Self-concept encompasses the beliefs that an individual holds about their physical, psychological, social, and overall characteristics. It includes aspirations and achievements that are linked to their physical and psychological traits over time. This means that self-concept is shaped not only by one's current attributes but also by their goals and past accomplishments, influencing how they view themselves in various aspects of life.

Social Adjustment:

Social adjustment refers to the interaction of individuals with the rules, customs, and environment created by family and society, along with the acceptance of the outcomes of these interactions by society. Humans are social beings, born and raised in a social-physical environment. The balance between the expectations of the environment and individuals' efforts to meet those expectations is essential for life. When a person's natural desires are not fulfilled, they gradually come to terms with the unpleasant situation, a process known as "adjustment." Among all of God's creations, human life is the most sacred. Human life has two perspectives: the biological and the social. Nourishment and reproduction represent the biological aspect, while education embodies the social aspect of human life. Education enhances a child's intellectual capacity and plays a crucial role in ensuring their progress. It empowers the child to become aware and fulfil various responsibilities in life, thus significantly contributing to their overall development.

The question arises: how should an individual strive to adjust within their home, family, friends, relatives, neighbours, and the entire community? Firstly, one must learn the lessons of sociality correctly and apply them

with sincerity. This includes embodying all social virtues and prioritizing the fulfilment of duties over claims to rights. Emphasizing responsibility fosters a more harmonious and supportive social environment, encouraging better interactions and relationships with others. According to Boring, Langfeld, and Baid, "Adjustment is the process through which an organism maintains a balance between its needs and the circumstances that influence the fulfillment of those needs. For social individuals, behaviour can be either adaptive or maladaptive, referred to as adjustment and maladjustment, respectively. The range of an organism's behaviour is influenced by social norms, levels, habits, and various patterns of behaviour." This definition highlights the dynamic interplay between an individual's needs and the social environment, emphasizing the importance of successful adjustment for overall well-being. Example: A student wishes to join the Air Force after completing his education, but his health issues and his parents' objections prevent him from achieving this goal, leading to dissatisfaction, mental stress, and behavioural instability. He then decides to set a new goal of becoming a good officer in an airline office instead of joining the Air Force. If he succeeds in this new objective, it will be considered his "adjustment" to the circumstances.

Objectives of the Research Study:

Every action taken by an individual is driven by some inherent purpose. Without a purpose, an individual does not perform any action. The main objectives of this research study are as follows:

1. A comparative study of the academic anxiety of urban and rural students participating in various competitive exams in Meerut city.

2. A comparative study of the self-concept of male and female students participating in various competitive exams in Meerut city.

3. A comparative study of the self-concept of urban and rural students participating in various competitive exams in Meerut city.

METHODOLOGY OF STUDY:

Considering the nature of this research study, it seems appropriate to use a "descriptive research" survey method. Therefore, the researcher has employed the survey method in this study.

Population of the Study:

In this research study, a total of 600 students participating in various competitive exams studying in Meerut city have been selected, comprising 300 boys and 300 girls from coaching institutes located in the city.

Tools Used in the Study:

For this research work, the researcher searched for tools that align with the objectives. Thus, the researcher consulted with research supervisors and other experienced scholars in the research field and, based on their advice, utilized a standardized tool for measuring academic anxiety.

Scope of the Study:

This research study is limited to coaching institutes located in Meerut city.

RESULTS:

Hypothesis Testing - 1:

There is no significant difference in academic anxiety between urban and rural students participating in various competitive exams in Meerut city. The calculated values related to this hypothesis are presented in Table 1.0.

Table No - 1.0

Group	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Critical Ratio	Level of Significance
Urban	320	68.41	19.72	2.21	0.05 = 1.96
Rural	280	70.98	20.05		0.01 = 2.59

Explanation:

Table 1.0 illustrates the academic anxiety levels of urban and rural students participating in various competitive exams in Meerut city. The mean and standard deviation for urban students is 68.41 and 19.72, respectively, while for rural students, it is 70.98 and 20.05. The calculated t-ratio between the two groups is 2.21. This t-ratio exceeds the significance levels of both 0.01 and 0.05, indicating a significant difference between the

two groups. This demonstrates that there is a meaningful difference in academic anxiety between urban and rural students participating in various competitive exams in Meerut district.

Hypothesis Testing - 2:

There is no significant difference in self-concept between male and female students participating in various competitive exams in Meerut city. The calculated values related to this hypothesis are presented in Table 2.0

Table No - 2.0

Group	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Critical Ratio	Level of Significance
Boys	320	141.78	24.06		
Girls	280	144.23	26.52	0.96	0.05 = 1.96 0.01 = 2.59

Explanation:

Table 2.0 illustrates the self-concept of male and female students participating in various competitive exams in Meerut city. The mean and standard deviation for male students is 141.78 and 24.06, respectively, while for female students, the mean and standard deviation are 144.23 and 26.52. The calculated value of the test statistic is 0.96. This value is below the significance levels of both 0.01 and 0.05, indicating that there is no significant difference between the two groups. Thus, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference in the self-concept of male and female students participating in various competitive exams in Meerut district.

Hypothesis Testing - 3:

No significant difference is found in the anxiety levels of students participating in various competitive exams. The calculated values related to this hypothesis are presented in Table 3.0.

Table No - 3.0

Group	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Critical Ratio	Level of Significance
Urban Students	320	137.41	23.52		0.05 = 1.96 0.01 = 2.59
Rural Students	280	140.97	24.76	1.23	

EAST-WEST THOUGHT

Explanation:

Table 3.0 presents the self-concept of urban and rural students participating in various competitive exams in Meerut city. The mean and standard deviation for urban students are 137.41 and 23.52, respectively, while for rural students, they are 140.97 and 24.76. The calculated t-ratio between the two groups is 1.23. This t-ratio is less than the significance levels of both 0.01 and 0.05, indicating that there is no significant difference between the self-concept of urban and rural students in Meerut district participating in various competitive exams.

Conclusion:

This research study aimed to investigate differences in academic anxiety and self-concept among students participating in competitive exams in Meerut city, focusing on variables such as urban versus rural backgrounds and gender. The findings of the study present several insights:

1. Academic Anxiety between Urban and Rural Students:

The results indicate a significant difference in academic anxiety levels between urban and rural students. Rural students exhibited higher anxiety levels compared to their urban counterparts, as evidenced by a t-ratio exceeding the significance threshold. This suggests that the learning environment and access to resources may differ between these groups, potentially contributing to increased academic pressure on rural students.

2. Self-Concept between Male and Female Students:

No significant difference was found in self-concept between male and female students, suggesting that both genders view themselves similarly in terms of confidence, self-worth, and abilities when preparing for competitive exams. This aligns with the broader trend of gender equality in academic self-perception.

3. Self-Concept between Urban and Rural Students:

Similar to the gender analysis, no significant difference was found in self-concept between urban and rural students. This indicates that regardless of geographic location, students perceive themselves similarly in terms of self-concept, even if their levels of academic anxiety differ.

EAST-WEST THOUGHT

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In conclusion, while geographic location influences academic anxiety levels, it does not significantly affect students' self-concept. Additionally, gender does not play a significant role in shaping students' self-concept or anxiety in the context of competitive exams. These findings could help educators and policymakers in understanding the unique challenges faced by different student groups, allowing for better support systems, especially for rural students facing higher academic anxiety.

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