GENDER-SPECIFIC ANXIETY IN SCHOOLCHILDREN AGED 10-11 YEARS

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Abstract

Study of individual school adaptation requires a comprehensive study of the characteristics of the school motivation, anxiety, and social self-assessment taking into account such characteristics as age and gender of students. A total of 86 schoolchildren of 4-form and 5-form aged 10-11 were questioned. Psychological diagnostics included: “Anxiety Scale”; Phillips school test of anxiety; projective technique “Thermometer”, the method “Symbolic task to identify the social self-esteem”, the questionnaire “Evaluation of School motivation level”. Girls have rather high school level of motivation and self-esteem, compared to the boys with the average level of learning motivation and self-esteem. The boys often have total school anxiety, some fear that their knowledge would be checked, some concerns and fears in relation to teachers. Girls’ physiological resistance to stress correlates with such factors as: high level of stress, social expression fear feelings, fear not to meet the expectations of others. Boys’ increase of interpersonal anxiety correlates with an increase of the fear of self-expression and improving the overall school anxiety correlates with increasing levels of frustration needs to succeed. The results allow making effective psychological and prevention programs to work with anxiety states of schoolchildren.

Keywords: anxiety, motivation to learn, gender-specific characteristics, school adaptation, school students

Relevance

Issues of anxiety in children and adolescents have been crucial for researchers in recent years as they are not only associated with the learning process (Wang et al, 2014).
but also with mental health of the younger generation (Cartwright-Hatton, 2006; Nikolaev, 2006). Children’s anxiety can be a manifestation of certain mental and behavioural disorders (Creswell et al., 2016). Parents of children and adolescents are very concerned about anxiety disorders in their children (Ishikawa et al., 2014). Parents often have to adapt to such conditions in children (Thompson-Hollandsa et al., 2014). Moreover, children’s anxiety is often associated with a symptomatic depressive disorder (Cummings et al., 2014) that requires professional treatment.

Scientists often see the family as the origin of anxiety in children (Bögels et al., 2001; Nikolaev & Afanasyev, 2004; McLeod et al., 2007), in the style of parenting in particular (Brown & Whiteside, 2008; A. Pereira et al., 2014). The investigation was aimed at the predictors of children’s anxiety related to parental factors (Affrunti & Ginsburg, 2012). Therefore, quite essential are issues of gender anxiety in children and adolescents (Lewinsohn et al., 1998; Doey et al., 2014.).

**State of the problem**

An important task of education, including school education, is creation and maintenance of psychological conditions that provide full psychological and personal development of each schoolchild. Mental health is of great importance for the development of an individual, i.e., their state of mental, physical and social well-being (Aleksandrov et al., 2015).

In the course of studying at school, the schoolchild’s personality is influenced by internal and external factors that may prevent successful adaptation. These factors are high trait anxiety preventing productive educational activity, school failures, domestic difficulties and adverse communication with peers. Schoolchildren’s success, except for personal qualities, is also influenced by specific factors such as information load, parents’ expectations, vulnerability of social and economic status etc. All combined, they create an increased stress pattern, which causes an increase in the level of both situational and personal anxiety exerting negative impact on children’s adaptation to school (Drovnikov et al., 2016).

School anxiety is closely related to motivation exercises. Children with low level of anxiety have motivation to achieve success – the desire to do their work in the best possible
way, combined with the motive of high marks receiving and being met with approval. The motive to avoid failure is inherent in both anxious schoolchildren and those without any evident anxiety.

These differentiated psychological and prophylactic psychological activities should not only account for the overall school situation, but also for gender and age features of motivation, school anxiety and self-esteem of schoolchildren. This will make it possible to develop effective programs for anxiety level reduction and improving of psychological well-being of schoolchildren.

**Material and methods**

To investigate the gender-specific anxiety in school-age children, 86 schoolchildren of the fourth to fifth forms at the age of 10-11 years were questioned. Among the respondents 39 persons were in the fourth form and 47 persons were in the fifth form. In total, 46 female 40 male schoolchildren took part in the study.

The following psychological diagnostic methods were used: the “Anxiety Scale” by M. Kikina and E. Ovsyannikova; Phillips school test of anxiety; the “Thermometer” projective technique by Y. Kiselev, the method of “Symbolic task to identify the social self-esteem” (Long, Ziller, Henderson), the “Evaluation of School motivation level” questionnaire by N. Luskanova. The obtained data was analysed by mathematical and statistical methods using Statistica version 10 software.

**Results and their discussion**

School motivation investigation revealed significant differences in the level of educational motivation in the study groups (t = 3.8; p < 0.0005). It showed that schoolgirls were more diligent at doing schoolwork and striving to meet all the school requirements. They were very active at memorizing and mastering new information necessary for successful schooling, with a high level of school motivation, which is the average rate for successful learning of school subjects. At the same time the schoolboys manifested average motivation in education which may indicate the difficulties encountered in the learning of disciplines. Most schoolgirls had a good level of motivation for educational activity, which was 56.5% and 30.4% of girls had positive motivation. At the same time 17.5% of schoolboys
had negative motivation for schooling and only 37.5% of them had positive motivation to learn. The distribution of high and low motivation in the study groups had the same tendency, the same percentage of schoolchildren showed low and high levels of motivation. That is the evidence that schoolboys are often observed to have lower levels of cognitive activity and the desire to do school exercises, which cannot but affect their success. In this connection, these schoolchildren might reach increased level of training anxiety studying school subjects perceived by them as difficult or uninteresting.

The investigation of academic anxiety in the course of school subject learning revealed that in fact, there was no difference between the levels of school-based anxiety of the respondents. This high level of academic anxiety was registered in 7.5% of the schoolboys, this reflecting difficulties faced by them in the process of mastering school subjects. The low level of academic anxiety in 4.4% of the school girls and 5% of the schoolboys suggests that some subjects are not interesting for children and consequently, children have no desire to do anything during these classes.

However, there were some differences revealed between the schoolboys and schoolgirls’ educational anxiety concerning the subjects they study at school. Specifically, increased anxiety in schoolgirls was associated with the study of mathematics and English, whereas schoolboys had difficulties with Russian language. This fact proves that schoolboys are less successful in the humanities and they are a little better at the disciplines of the mathematical cycle. Schoolgirls very often find physical education uninteresting as compared with schoolboys. The manifestation of cognitive activity of schoolchildren depends not so much on their commitment to obtain the related knowledge but on special abilities that characterise the success of mastering mathematics or humanities. Training can also increase anxiety concerning the subjects where schoolchildren have no initial skills. However, having a high level of learning motivation, schoolchildren seek to master these subjects as well as the other disciplines. Failures in the study of these subjects can adversely affect the schoolchildren’s self-esteem, while declination of the latter may increase their level of anxiety.

The study of schoolchildren’ self-esteem using techniques of symbolic task to identify their “social self-esteem” showed that the vast majority of schoolchildren had a medium
level of social self-esteem (60.8% and 62.5%, respectively). Most of schoolgirls felt more confident than boys in the school community (T = 1.9; p = 0.051).

The identified features of educational motivation, self-esteem and anxiety specifics during the study of certain subjects by schoolchildren in the studied groups were considered as psychological factors that determined the severity of various types and characteristics of the children’s anxiety.

In this connection, the next step of the research was to investigate the dominant types of anxiety in the schoolchildren according to their gender using the “Scales of anxiety” and to study the level and nature of their anxiety using the “Phillips’ school anxiety” questionnaire.

It was revealed that most participants of the study groups had a high level of academic anxiety that was revealed in 32.6% of schoolgirls and 27.5% of schoolboys. High levels of self-esteem and interpersonal anxiety were often registered in 17.4% of schoolgirls, while they were not revealed in schoolboys (p <0.02). However, the majority of the schoolchildren had an average level of learning, self-esteem and interpersonal anxiety.

The increased level of anxiety, associated with interpersonal relationships in schoolgirls, indicated possible difficulties in establishing and maintaining good relationships with their peers. Thus, the schoolgirls’ anxiety might have been caused by an increased level of motivation to learn, as well as higher levels of self-esteem, and difficulties with gaining knowledge. The schoolboys’ anxiety might have been caused by difficulties with assimilating new information as the result of loss of interest in learning and decreased self-esteem.

The study of school anxiety makes it possible to examine the nature of school anxiety and requires carrying out a more detailed study on the nature of learning, self-esteem and personal anxiety in each of the study groups.

The results of studies of school anxiety using the Phillips’s questionnaire showed that girls had elevated values of frustration of need for achievement (59 ± 28), fear of self-expression (56 ± 24). These characteristics determined the adverse emotional background; deterrent need for achievement that resulted in negative emotions due to the necessity of self-discovery and demonstration of one’s features. The boys were observed to have increased rates of overall school anxiety (55±17), frustration of need for achievement (51 ± 23), fear of
self-expression (52±19). This describes the general characteristics of school anxiety, fear of self-expression and presentation of one’s features.

To investigate the specificity of anxiety in schoolchildren, a correlation analysis of the study results was performed for the school groups.

The correlation analysis revealed that the anxiety among girls was characterized by the following features: greater physiological stress tolerance corresponded with higher cognitive activity of schoolchildren (r = -0.35; p < 0.05) and level of self-esteem (r = 0.37; p < 0.01). There was no intense fear of knowledge assessment or fear not to meet expectations of others. Low resistance to physiological stress was associated with a high level of social stress experience (r = 0.6; p < 0.001) and fear of self-expression (r = 0.28; p < 0.05). In turn, a high level of fear of expression was associated with increased levels of frustration of need for achievement (r = 0.38; p < 0.01), for fear of the situation knowledge test (r = 0.28; p < 0.05), fear not to meet expectations of others (r = 0.36; p < 0.05). These features may adversely affect successful learning of school subjects as well as emotional and physiological states characterized by negative emotions, reduced reserve capacity of the organism and increased risk of psychosomatic and neurological diseases.

According to the results of the correlation analysis, the characteristics of anxiety in schoolboys can be described as a manifestation of interpersonal anxiety, which is associated with the training (r = 0.66; p < 0.001) and self-esteem anxiety (r = 0.53; p < 0.001). Increased level of interpersonal anxiety is associated with an increase in fear of self-expression (r = 0.32; p < 0.05). Increase of overall school anxiety is associated with elevation of the levels of frustration of achievement need (r = 0.43; p < 0.01) and fear not to meet the expectations of others (r = 0.34; p < 0.05). These features may result in difficulties with establishing positive interpersonal relationships with schoolmates, lower self-esteem and affect the motivation to study for the schoolchildren.

**Conclusion**

1. Schoolgirls are more cognitively active and have a high level of academic motivation, which is the average rate for successful mastery of school subjects. Schoolboys
are observed to have an average level of learning motivation, which might be caused by difficulties encountered in the course of learning disciplines.

2. Schoolgirls trend to have higher self-esteem than schoolboys. This shows that girls often feel more confident than boys in the school community.

3. Self-esteem and interpersonal anxiety are more evident in schoolgirls. This leads to the assumption that welfare of interpersonal relationships and interrelation establishment with peers play a vital role for schoolgirls.

4. The schoolboys often have overall school anxiety, fear of knowledge assessment, concerns and fears relating to their teachers. Schoolgirls’ anxiety is associated with low physiological stress tolerance, fear not to meet expectations of others, frustration of need for achievement.

5. Schoolgirls’ anxiety is characterized by the following features: greater physiological stress tolerance results in better cognitive activity and self-esteem of schoolchildren, in which case there is no intense fear of knowledge assessment or fear not to meet expectations of others. Low resistance to physiological stress is associated with high levels of stress and of fear of self-expression, which is associated with higher levels of frustration of need for achievement and fear not to meet expectations of others.

6. Psychological features of anxiety in schoolboys can be described as a manifestation of interpersonal anxiety, which is associated with learning and self-esteem anxiety. Elevated indices of interpersonal anxiety are associated with an increase in fear of self-expression. Increased values of general school anxiety are associated with increased levels of frustration of achievement need and with fear not to meet expectations of others.

References


