

Academic Achievement and Adjustment between Adolescent Boys and Girls in Context of Academic Anxiety and Mental Health

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ABSTRACT

The present empirical investigation was carried out on 200 female adolescents of urban Patna to examine their academic achievement and adjustment in context of academic anxiety and mental health respectively. It was hypothesized that (i) adolescents of high and low academic anxiety groups will differ significantly from one another in terms of their academic achievement. (ii) Adolescents of high and low academic anxiety groups will differ significantly from one another in terms of their adjustment. (iii) Adolescents of sound and poor mental health groups will differ significantly from one another in terms of their academic achievement. (iv) adolescents of sound and poor mental health groups will differ significantly from one another in terms of their adjustment. For the purpose, adolescents were administered Academic Anxiety Scale for Children, Mental Health Battery and High School Adjustment Inventory along with PDS to measure the variables. Academic achievement was measured using average of two consecutive school examination results. The data obtained were treated using t-test. The results supported the hypotheses. It was found that adolescents of low academic anxiety group and sound mental health group excelled over their counterparts in terms of having high academic achievement and sound adjustment respectively. Thus, it was concluded that academic achievement and adjustment both are the function of academic anxiety and mental health amongst adolescents.

Keywords: Academic Achievement, Adjustment, Academic Anxiety, Adolescence, Mental Health

Introduction

Adolescence is a period of profound change, both physically and psychologically, marked by the transition from childhood to adulthood. During this critical stage of life, adolescents are faced with numerous challenges that impact their mental health, social relationships, and academic performance. Among these challenges, academic achievement and adjustment are paramount, as they significantly shape an adolescent's self-esteem, social identity, and future opportunities. However, these aspects of adolescence are not experienced equally across genders, and the interplay between mental health, academic anxiety, and academic achievement varies in complex ways between boys and girls.

Academic achievement refers to the degree to which a student successfully meets the academic standards and goals set by educational institutions. It is often measured by grades, test scores, and overall performance. On the other hand, academic adjustment

refers to the process by which adolescents adapt to the academic demands of their educational environment. It includes aspects such as coping strategies, time management skills, and emotional responses to academic challenges. Both academic achievement and adjustment are closely linked to an adolescent's mental health, with poor mental health often leading to difficulties in academic performance and adaptation.

Mental health, in this context, can be understood as the emotional and psychological well-being of an adolescent, which includes their ability to manage stress, regulate emotions, and maintain a positive self-concept. Academic anxiety, a key factor influencing both mental health and academic performance, plays a significant role in this relationship. Academic anxiety refers to the stress and worry students experience related to their academic responsibilities, such as fear of failure, pressure to

meet expectations, and difficulty managing workload. While anxiety is a normal response to challenges, excessive academic anxiety can impair academic achievement and adjustment, leading to a range of negative outcomes such as poor grades, increased dropout rates, and mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety disorders.

Research indicates that boys and girls experience academic anxiety and its effects on academic achievement differently. For instance, some studies suggest that girls are more likely to report higher levels of academic anxiety than boys, which may influence their academic behaviors and outcomes. Girls may feel more pressure to achieve academically, particularly in environments where there are gendered expectations surrounding performance. On the other hand, boys may be less likely to verbalize or acknowledge anxiety, leading to underreporting of academic stress and possibly masking underlying issues that affect their academic adjustment. Furthermore, boys and girls may adopt different coping mechanisms in response to academic challenges, with girls often using more emotion-focused coping strategies and boys relying on problem-focused strategies.

The role of gender in shaping academic anxiety and mental health outcomes among adolescents is a complex one, as it is influenced by a range of societal, cultural, and psychological factors. Gender differences in academic anxiety may stem from different societal expectations placed on boys and girls. For instance, girls are often socialized to value academic achievement as a measure of their worth, leading to heightened pressure and anxiety when they feel they are not meeting those expectations. Girls may also experience more internalizing behaviors such as anxiety and depression in response to academic challenges, as they are more likely to internalize stress and emotional distress.

In contrast, boys are often socialized to downplay vulnerability and emotional expression, which may affect how they experience and cope with academic anxiety. Boys may be more likely to externalize their stress through behaviors such as irritability or aggression, which can affect their academic performance and social relationships. Additionally, boys may experience societal pressure to excel in areas other than academics, such as sports

or social status, which can create a different type of academic anxiety focused on proving competence in ways that are not necessarily linked to academic achievement. The different ways in which boys and girls experience academic anxiety and mental health issues are not limited to cultural expectations but also extend to biological and developmental differences. For example, girls tend to mature earlier than boys, which can result in differences in cognitive and emotional development. This early maturation may make girls more susceptible to mental health challenges during adolescence, including anxiety and depression. Boys, on the other hand, may experience a delayed emotional development, leading to a greater tendency to engage in risk-taking behaviors or to struggle with emotional regulation during stressful academic situations.

Academic anxiety has a significant impact on adolescents' academic achievement and adjustment. Students who experience high levels of anxiety may have difficulty concentrating, completing assignments, or participating in class. The stress associated with academic anxiety can impair cognitive functioning, leading to problems with memory, decision-making, and problem-solving. As a result, students who experience academic anxiety may not perform to the best of their abilities, which in turn can lead to further anxiety and a cycle of poor academic performance.

Furthermore, academic anxiety can affect adolescents' ability to adjust to the demands of their educational environment. Academic adjustment involves a variety of coping strategies, such as time management, goal setting, and seeking support when needed. Adolescents who are highly anxious may struggle with these strategies, either by avoiding academic tasks out of fear or by becoming overwhelmed by the perceived pressure to succeed. This lack of adjustment can lead to greater feelings of frustration, isolation, and helplessness, which in turn can exacerbate mental health problems.

For both boys and girls, high levels of academic anxiety are associated with lower levels of academic achievement. However, the mechanisms through which anxiety impacts achievement may differ. For instance, girls may experience more cognitive distortions related to academic performance, such as perfectionism or catastrophizing, which can undermine their confidence and hinder their academic progress.

Boys, on the other hand, may struggle with academic anxiety in more subtle ways, such as procrastination or disengagement, which can similarly impair their academic performance.

The relationship between mental health, academic achievement, and adjustment during adolescence is intricate and highly influenced by gender. Academic anxiety is a critical factor that affects both boys and girls, shaping their academic experiences and mental health outcomes in different ways. Understanding how gender influences the experience of academic anxiety and mental health is essential for developing targeted interventions that can help adolescents better navigate academic challenges and promote positive mental health outcomes. Both boys and girls face unique pressures during adolescence that affect their academic achievement, and addressing these challenges requires a nuanced approach that considers the specific needs of each gender.

Review of Literature:

Pomerantz and Saxon⁸ (2001) examined the influence of gender on academic anxiety and achievement among adolescents. The study found that girls typically experience higher levels of academic anxiety than boys, particularly in subjects where they feel societal pressure to excel (e.g., language arts, social studies). This anxiety, in turn, affects their academic performance, as girls tend to internalize stress more than boys. The study highlights that although boys and girls face similar academic pressures, gender differences in coping strategies and emotional regulation contribute significantly to divergent academic outcomes. Zeidner's¹¹ (1998) research focused on the role of academic anxiety as a determinant of mental health during adolescence. The study suggested that high levels of academic anxiety can lead to mental health issues such as depression, social withdrawal, and poor self-esteem, particularly when students perceive their academic abilities as insufficient. Zeidner pointed out that while both boys and girls are susceptible to academic anxiety, girls are more likely to exhibit internalizing behaviors like anxiety and depression, which negatively impact their overall mental health. Chorvat² (2005) conducted a study that analyzed the relationship between gender, academic anxiety, and academic achievement.

Results showed that adolescent girls generally

experience greater levels of academic anxiety, which leads to lower academic performance in high-stress environments, such as exam settings. Boys, in contrast, were found to display less anxiety overall, but their academic achievement was often hindered by other stressors, such as behavioral issues or external pressures related to gendered expectations of "success" in non-academic fields (e.g., sports). Compas³ (2001) explored the different coping strategies employed by boys and girls in response to academic stress. The study highlighted that girls are more likely to use emotion-focused coping mechanisms, such as rumination or seeking social support, which can either help or hinder their academic adjustment, depending on the context. On the other hand, boys tend to use problem-focused coping strategies, such as avoiding tasks or focusing on non-academic interests. These different approaches can affect how each gender adjusts to academic pressure and, ultimately, their academic achievement. McKeever⁷ (2010) reviewed the link between academic stress, mental health, and academic outcomes in adolescents.

The study found that stressors related to academic performance, such as exams, grades, and competition, could trigger both mental health issues and decreased academic achievement. Girls, in particular, were shown to experience heightened stress levels during periods of academic assessment, leading to greater rates of depression and anxiety. The study emphasizes the need for educational interventions that address mental health to improve academic adjustment and performance. Hernandez and McClain⁵ (2006) examined the relationship between academic anxiety and self-esteem in adolescents, with a focus on gender differences. The researchers found that while both boys and girls report academic anxiety, the way this anxiety affects self-esteem differs. Girls, who are more likely to associate their self-worth with academic performance, experience a greater negative impact on their self-esteem when they perform poorly. In contrast, boys were more likely to dissociate their self-esteem from academic success, though this might result in disengagement or underachievement in academic contexts. Skaalvik and Skaalvik¹⁰ (2014) explored gender differences in academic motivation and anxiety, revealing that adolescent girls are more likely to

experience achievement-related anxiety, which in turn can affect their motivation. While girls may feel pressured to achieve high grades, they may also fear failure more acutely, leading to avoidance behaviors or performance deficits. Boys, conversely, were found to experience lower levels of achievement anxiety but may struggle with motivation in academic settings if they do not feel a connection to the subject matter. Gilligan⁴ (2008) discussed how socio-cultural norms shape academic achievement and anxiety in adolescent boys and girls. She noted that societal expectations for boys to be strong, independent, and non-complaining contribute to lower reports of academic anxiety in boys, despite possible underlying stress. Girls, however, are socialized to be perfectionists and to internalize stress, which can increase academic anxiety and impact their mental health negatively. This study emphasizes the importance of recognizing how societal pressures uniquely affect each gender's experience of academic challenges. Putwain⁹ (2007) conducted a study on the role of gendered expectations in shaping academic anxiety among adolescents.

Baker and McEnery¹ (2005) reviewed literature on the interaction between mental health, coping mechanisms, and academic adjustment in adolescents. They found that gender plays a significant role in how adolescents cope with academic stress, with girls using more emotional and relational coping strategies, which sometimes lead to higher levels of anxiety and poorer academic adjustment. The study found that academic anxiety in both boys and girls negatively correlated with long-term academic achievement. However, gender differences were evident in how academic anxiety affected mental health. Girls with high academic anxiety were more likely to develop depression and social withdrawal, while boys were more prone to externalizing behaviors, such as aggression and non-compliance, which also hindered their academic success.

The reviewed literature provides a comprehensive understanding of how academic anxiety and mental health intersect with academic achievement and adjustment in adolescents, with significant gender differences. The studies reviewed highlight that both boys and girls experience academic anxiety, but the effects on academic achievement and

mental health differ due to variations in coping strategies, societal expectations, and internalization of stress. Understanding these gendered experiences can help in designing more effective interventions and support systems aimed at reducing academic anxiety and improving mental health outcomes for both boys and girls in educational settings.

Objectives: The study intended to compare adolescents of (i) high and low academic anxiety and (ii) sound and poor mental health groups in terms of their academic achievement and adjustment.

Hypothesis:

1. Adolescents of high and low academic anxiety groups will differ significantly from one another in terms of their academic achievement.
2. Adolescents of high and low academic anxiety groups will differ significantly from one another in terms of their adjustment.
3. Adolescents of sound and poor mental health groups will differ significantly from one another in terms of their academic achievement.
4. Adolescents of sound and poor mental health groups will differ significantly from one another in terms of their adjustment.

Method of Study :

Sample Used :

200 female adolescents were selected from among schools of Patna based on incidental-cum-purposive sampling technique. The adolescent respondents were matched in respect of community, inhabitation, culture and sex etc. so far as practicable. The respondents under study were of class IX and X aged ranging 13 to 16 yrs.

Design Employed :

Academic achievement and adjustment were treated as dependent variables for academic anxiety and mental health as independent variables. Since, comparable groups were consisted of independent subjects, So between group design was preferred.

Tools Used:

1. PDS was used to identify and select female the adolescents to seek their personal information.
2. Academic achievement was measured as the average of two successive school examination records respectively.
3. Academic Anxiety for school adolescents by Singh and Sen Gupta was used to measure

academic anxiety of school adolescents.

4. High School Adjustment Inventory by Singh and Sen Gupta was used to measure adjustment of the school adolescents.
5. Mental Health Battery by Singh and Sen Gupta was used to measure mental health of the school adolescents.

Results:

Table-1

Mean, SD and t-value for the groups of adolescents belonging to high and moderate or low academic anxiety groups on the measure academic achievement.

Variable	Groups	N	Mean	SD	t-value	df	p
Academic	High	115	65.17	6.49	7.08	198	<.01
Anxiety	Low	85	71.05	5.21			

It is clear from the table-01 that academic anxiety has significant effect on academic achievement amongst students. It was found that student group belonging to low academic anxiety group excelled and manifested higher mean on academic achievement (Mean= 71.05) as compared to adolescents belonging to high academic anxiety group (Mean = 65.17). The t-value obtained was also found significant ($t = 7.08$; $df = 198$; $p < .01$). Adolescents belonging to moderate and low anxiety groups excel in academic achievement compared to those with high academic anxiety because optimal or low levels of anxiety facilitate better concentration, memory retention, and cognitive performance. Moderate anxiety can act as a motivator, encouraging preparation and goal-oriented behavior without overwhelming the student. In contrast, high academic anxiety often leads to excessive worry, mental blocks, and reduced problem-solving abilities, impairing academic performance. It disrupts attention, lowers self-confidence, and causes avoidance behaviors, all of which hinder academic success. Thus, balanced emotional states support better academic functioning and achievement.

Table-2

Mean, SD and t-value between adolescents of high and low academic anxiety groups on adjustment measure.

Variable	Groups	N	Mean	SD	t-value	df	p
Academic	High	120	110.37	6.39	7.16	198	<.01
Anxiety	Low	80	116.24	5.17			

It is clear from the results of table-02 that academic anxiety has significant influence on adjustment amongst students. The mean on adjustment measure (mean = 110.37) by high academic anxiety group is comparatively lower than the mean on adjustment by low academic anxiety group of students (Mean = 116.24). The t-value was found significant ($t = 7.16$; $df = 198$; $p < .01$). Adolescents belonging to moderate and low academic anxiety groups tend to excel in adjustment because their anxiety levels are within a manageable range, allowing them to think clearly, stay focused, and effectively cope with academic demands. Moderate anxiety can serve as a motivator without overwhelming the individual, promoting better emotional regulation, interpersonal relationships, and problem-solving skills. In contrast, students with high academic anxiety often experience excessive worry, self-doubt, and fear of failure, which impairs concentration, increases stress, and hinders their social and emotional adjustment, leading to difficulties in adapting to academic and social environments effectively.

Table-3

Mean, SD and t-value between sound and poor mental health groups of adolescents for their academic achievement score.

Variable	Groups	N	Mean	SD	t-value	df	p
Academic	High	72	73.22	5.13	9.06	198	<.01
Anxiety	Low	128	65.52	6.78			

It is vivid from result table-03 that mental significantly influence academic achievement scores amongst students. The mean on academic achievement by sound mental health group of students is comparatively higher (Mean = 73.22) than the students of poor mental health group (Mean = 65.52). The t-value was found significant ($t = 9.06$; $df = 198$; $p < .01$). Students possessing sound mental health excel in academic achievement because they have better concentration, motivation, and emotional stability, which are essential for effective learning. Mentally healthy students can manage stress, maintain focus during studies, and engage actively in classroom activities. They exhibit higher self-esteem, better problem-solving abilities, and greater persistence in overcoming academic challenges. On the other hand, students with poor mental health may experience

anxiety, depression, or lack of motivation, which hinders their cognitive functions, reduces participation, and leads to absenteeism or academic disengagement. As a result, poor mental health negatively affects their performance and overall academic success.

Table 4

Mean, SD and t-value between sound and poor mental health groups of adolescents for adjustment score.

Variable Groups	N	Mean	SD	t-value	df	p
Academic High	72	80.49	5.34	9.03	198	<.01
Anxiety Low	128	72.63	6.80			

It is clear from the findings of t-value-04 that mental health significantly influence the adjustment amongst students. The mean on adjustment by sound mental health group of students is comparatively high (Mean = 80.49) than the mean by poor mental health group of students (Mean = 72.63). The t-value is found significant ($t = 9.03$; $df = 198$; $p < .01$). Students possessing sound mental health excel in adjustment because they are better equipped to manage stress, regulate emotions, and maintain positive relationships. Good mental health enhances resilience, self-confidence, and coping skills, enabling students to adapt effectively to academic, social, and personal challenges. They are more likely to engage in problem-solving, seek support when needed, and maintain a balanced outlook. In contrast, students with poor mental health often struggle with anxiety, depression, or low self-esteem, which impairs their ability to cope with change, communicate effectively, and maintain emotional stability, leading to poor adjustment across various domains of life.

Conclusions:

1. Academic anxiety is a significant contributor to academic achievement. Low level of academic anxiety is conducive to high academic achievement.
2. Academic anxiety is a significant contributor to adjustment. Low academic anxiety is conducive to sound adjustment.
3. Mental health is the significant contributor to academic achievement. Sound mental health is conducive to high academic achievement and vice-versa.
4. Mental health significantly influence adjustment

amongst adolescents. Sound mental health is conducive to sound adjustment patterns and vice-versa.

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