



SHYNESS / SOCIAL PHOBIA: INFLUENCE ON SELF-CONCEPT AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN HIGH- SCHOOL STUDENTS. SUGGESTED REMEDIAL MEASURES

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ABSTRACT

This study reports the influence of shyness on self-concept and academic achievement in high school children. In the present study Crozier's (1995) shyness scale, Singh's (1986) self-concept scale and academic achievement of the students were employed to find out the influence of shyness. 240 high school students served as subjects. Results revealed that as the shyness level increased self-concept of the students decreased linearly. Shyness is found to affect academic achievement negatively and significantly. Also, remedial measures for shyness/social phobia and further management have been discussed.

Key Words: Shyness, Social Phobia, Self concept, Academic Scores & High school students.

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Introduction

Shyness may be defined experientially as excessive self-focus characterized by negative self-evaluation that creates discomfort and/or inhibition in social situations and interferes with pursuing one's interpersonal or professional goals. Many pre-school, school going children and adolescents, show initial wariness on meeting a stranger, have doubts about one's ability to contribute effectively to social encounters and the belief that others will negatively evaluate one's action/behaviour. These patterns of behaviour lead to the withdrawal behaviour and social anxieties that characterize shyness or social phobia (Crozier, 1995). About 13% of the general population actually withdraw from daily life experiences in order to avoid the social interactions they dread (Anonymous, 2000). According to recent estimates, approximately 40 to 50% of American college students consider themselves to be shy (Carducci & Zimbardo, 1997). Given the large number of shy people, it is reasonable to expect that there is substantial heterogeneity among them, not only in terms of age of onset and shyness symptoms, but also in terms of social motivation. Indeed, previous research has demonstrated that there is a wide range of individual differences among shy college students in sociability (Cheek & Buss, 1981), dependency (Das, 1991), and social avoidance (Pilkonis, 1977).

Among students who are (compared to their peers) inactive in the classroom, many may be well adjusted academically and socially, but relatively quiet and content to work independently. In addition, research suggests that shy children participate in verbal interaction infrequently and exhibit poor communicative competence; and that quiet less talkative children are viewed as less approachable by peers, less socially competent and less desirable social partners (Evans, 1993). Even among Physical education students, it was reported that shyness though not completely affects performance, but partially it affects that performance (D'Souza, Singh & Basavarajappa, 1999). A common observation in shyness research is that the consequences of shyness are deeply troubling. A study on high school students by D'Souza, Urs and James (2000) revealed that students with more shyness are prone to neurotic tendency and it will have negative effects such as having low academic performance, which in turn further complicates the personality of the student. Higher the shyness more was the maladjustment in social and emotional adjustment of the high school students (D'Souza & Urs, 2001). In an interesting study on Shyness and dental disharmony, D'Souza et al (2001) reported that orthodontic problems had a significant influence over shyness and self-esteem. D'Souza, Urs & Ramaswamy (2003) reported that even self-esteem is negatively influenced by shyness. In a recent study on high school students by D'Souza (2003) revealed that high levels of shyness resulted in higher

levels of anxiety and contradictorily shyness did not influence that academic achievement of the students. A study on college students (D'Souza, 2004) indicated that a significant linear increase in the home, health, social, emotional and total maladjustments as the shyness levels increased. Clinical and applied developmental psychologists have long suggested that extremely shy and withdrawn children may be at 'risk' for later difficulties (Caspi, Elder & Bem, 1988). According to Brophy, (1996), some students are problematically shy or withdrawn in varying degrees, and a few may be headed towards schizophrenia.

Since the self-concept as a factor and its relationship is not explored, present study is an attempt to find out the shyness levels of high school students and to investigate the influence of shyness on self-concept and academic achievement.

Method

Sample

A total of 240 (145 Boys and 95 Girls) students served as subjects for the present study. The sample was selected from the 8th, 9th and 10th standard students of the Hardwicke High School, and St. Josephs High School, Mysore. The students were selected both from English and Kannada medium classes. Stratified Random sampling technique was used to select the sample. Their age varied from 12 to 15 years.

Research Tools

1. *Shyness Questionnaire*

This questionnaire was developed by Crozier (1995) of University College of Cardiff. It consists of 26 items and requires the subject to indicate his/her response by ticking 'YES', 'NO' or 'DON'T KNOW'. The items of the questionnaire are based on situations or interactions like performing in front of the class, being made fun of, being told off, having one's photograph taken, novel situations involving teachers, school-friends interaction and so on. Of the 26 items, shyness is indicated by a 'YES' response for 21 items and a 'NO' response for 5 items. Item analysis of the scale using SPSS program resulted in Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.817. For the shyness questionnaire, items worded in the direction of shyness, responses were scored 2 for 'YES', 1 for 'DON'T KNOW', and 0 for 'NO'. Scores were reversed for the items worded in the opposite direction.

2. *Self concept Questionnaire*

This questionnaire is developed by Singh (1986). It contains twenty-two traits. Each of the descriptive adjectives was prefaced by the phrase followed by five

point rating scale, the rating categories scored from 1 to 5, were entitled not at all, not very often, some of the time, most of the time and all the time. A score of 1 was given on any item of subject checked on the first category, a score of 5 if the category were marked. A score on the self-concept scale will be obtained for each subject by summing the ratings ascribed to himself on each item. Lower score will presume to reflect the degree of self-disparagement.

3. Academic Scores

These are scores secured by the students in their Final Examination of the previous year, which is out of 600 marks. These scores have been taken from the concerned class teachers /office records.

Procedure

The tests were administered to the subjects in groups of 5-10 subjects per group. Data collection was done in 2 sessions and each session lasted for 60 minutes. In the first session, rapport was established with the subjects and they were asked to introduce themselves. The purpose of the study was made clear to them. Then they were administered the Shyness questionnaire. They were given appropriate instructions and the questionnaires were read out to them. They were asked to indicate their responses in the respective sheets given to them. Whenever they had doubt in understanding questions, the test administrator made those questions very clear to them in their local language. In the second session, the subjects were administered the Self-concept scale and they were asked to indicate their responses in the scoring sheet given to them.

Statistical Analysis

Shyness scores were graded into 3 categories (Low, medium and High) and Two-way Analysis of variance was applied to find out the difference between various levels of shyness and the self concept scores as well as their academic achievement. Also Duncan's Multiple Range Test (as a post hoc test) was applied to find out the significance of difference between means, whenever F value was found to be significant using SPSS (Windows Version 10.0) Statistical Package.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents mean self-concept and academic achievement scores in relation to various levels of shyness along with their gender. Table 2 shows results of Two-way ANOVA for mean self-concept and academic achievement scores in relation to various levels of shyness along with their gender.

Shyness, Gender and Self-concept

Students with different levels of shyness differed significantly in their self-concept scores ($F=8.485$; $p<000$). The mean values clearly indicated that as the shyness level increased, self-concept scores also decreased linearly. The respective mean values for low, medium and high levels of shyness are 86.78, 82.28 and 79.60. Further DMRT revealed that each shyness group differed significantly from other 2 levels of shyness. Boys (mean 84.99) were found to have significantly ($F=4.309$; $p<.039$) higher self concept compared to girls (mean 82.26). The interaction effect between shyness level and sex is also found to be non-significant ($F=1.124$; $p<.327$), indicating that the pattern of self-concept is same among boys and girls irrespective of the shyness level they belong to.

Shyness, Gender and Academic Achievement

Shyness level influenced significantly ($F=6.801$; $p<.001$) the academic achievement of the students. The respective academic scores of the students belonging to low, medium and high levels of shyness are 473.02, 446.20, 431.75, where we find the negative influence of shyness on academic achievement. Further DMRT revealed that mean scores of high and medium levels of shyness did not differ significantly; only mean academic scores of low shyness level group differed significantly from other 2 levels of shyness. Girls found to excel boys significantly ($F=12.788$; $p<.000$) in their academic achievement. The interaction effect between shyness level and sex is also found to be significant ($F=4.045$; $p<.019$), indicating that shyness affected boys most of the time and not the girls, where academic achievement of the girls are almost same in all the shyness groups.

The results of the present study are in very much in agreement with the studies done earlier. Shyness evokes negative effect, which leads to sadness, unhappiness and fearfulness, and tendency to describe oneself as 'shy natured' is associated with low global self esteem and with feelings of low self worth in several domains of the self (Crozier, 1995). Shyness was associated with depression, loneliness, fearfulness, social anxiety, neuroticism, retrospective inhibition and low self-esteem (Schmidt & Nathan, 1995). High levels of shyness lead to less self-esteem and less academic achievement also (Rafi, 1998). Shyness and internalizing behaviour problem were the most common personality feature observed and comorbid diagnosis were quite frequent. Shyness affects even the language development at early age (Paul & Kellog, 1997). Most of the studies done by D'Souza and his group revealed the common factor that shyness affects academic achievement adversely.

Suggested Strategies for Coping with Shy or Withdrawn Students

Strategies for coping with shy or withdrawn children include peer and teacher interactions, medication and other types of psychological interventions. Teachers can help shy students in many ways like changing social environment, shaping/encouraging increased responsiveness, minimizing stress/embarrassment, engaging in special activities and involving students in private talks. Other types of psychological interventions include cognitive behaviour therapy, encouraging children to join volunteer groups outside the schools, using them as peer tutors, avoiding putting them in situations that would be embarrassing or frightening, and assigning them messenger roles or other tasks that require communication (Brophy, 1996). Medication like Beta-Blockers (*Inderal*), Antidepressants, Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRI's) (*Fludac* and *Prozac*), does help in reducing shyness.

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