Relationship Between Shyness and Fear Among High School Students[#]

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The present study investigates the relationship between shyness and fear among high school students of Mysore city, India. A total of 311 high school students studying in VIII, IX and X grades in English and Kannada medium were randomly selected for the study. They were administered the Shyness Questionnaire (Crozier, 1995) and Fear Checklist (Kaur, 1989). The results revealed that, as the level of shyness increased, fear scores also increased linearly. Students studying in Kannada medium were found to be more fearful as compared to students studying in English medium.

Keywords: Shyness, fear, high school students, medium of instruction.

Shyness may be defined experientially as discomfort and/or inhibition in interpersonal situations that interferes with pursuit of interpersonal or professional goals. It is a form of excessive self-focus, a preoccupation with one's thoughts, feelings and physical reactions. Shyness may vary from mild social awkwardness to totally inhibiting social phobia. It may be chronic and dispositional, serving as a personality trait that is central to one's self definition. Situational shyness involves experiencing the symptoms of shyness in specific social performance situations but not incorporating it into one's self-concept. The reactions for shyness can occur at any or all of the following levels: cognitive, affective, physiological and behavioral, and may be triggered by a wide variety of arousal cues (Henderson & Zimbardo, 1996). Some of the arousal cues are authorities, one-on-one opposite sex interactions, intimacy, strangers, having to take individuating action in a group setting, and initiating social actions in unstructured, spontaneous behavioral settings.

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Shyness in itself is not a psychological disorder, and therefore doesn't warrant medication. But, if bashfulness prevents a person from functioning, or depression or anxiety accompanies it, then medication can be helpful. A common observation in most of the shyness research is that the consequences of shyness are deeply troubling. Shyness leads to higher levels of anxiety (D'Souza, 2003), neurotic tendency and lower academic performance (D'Souza, Urs, & James, 2000), lowered performance in physical education students (D'Souza, Singh, & Basavarajappa, 1999), lowered self-esteem (D'Souza, Urs, & Ramaswamy, 2003), and social and emotional maladjustment (D'Souza & Urs, 2001). Some other studies revealed that (Bell et al., 1994) young adults with high shyness might be at risk for Parkinson disease later in life. Janoski, Bell, and Peterson (1994) reported that there is a structural connection between childhood shyness and adult panic attacks. Three paths were confirmed, the first with hay fever, second with anxiety and third with a combination of anxiety and anxiety sensitivity.

A degree of shyness is normal whenever social expectations are new or ambiguous. Shyness begins to emerge as a problem if it becomes not merely situational but dispositional, to the extent that the child is labeled as shy. The studies related to shyness and fear are very scanty in India. This study aims to study the relationship between shyness and fear in high school students. Since fear is closely related to anxiety, it was hypothesized that shyness influences fear.

METHOD

Sample

High school students studying in classes VIII, IX and X were selected for the present study. Of the total 311 students included in the study, 172 were boys and remaining 139 were girls. They were studying in three high schools of Mysore city: Maharaja's High School, D. Banumaiah's High School, and St. Mary's High School. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select the sample. The sample involved students studying in both Kannada and English medium. Their age varied from 11 to 16 years.

Hypotheses

1. Students with high levels of shyness have high fear scores.
2. Students studying in different grades differ significantly in their fear scores.

3. Students studying in Kannada and English medium of instructions differ significantly in their fear scores.

Instruments

Shyness Questionnaire

This questionnaire was developed by Crozier (1995) in 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, and 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. Items are worded in the direction of shyness, and scored 2 for 'Yes', 1 for 'Don't Know', and 0 for 'No'. Scores were reversed for the items worded in the opposite direction. The negative items are 9, 10, 15, 16, and 23.

High scores indicate high level of shyness and low scores indicate low level of shyness. Depending on the scores the subjects were classified into three levels of shyness: high, medium, and low shyness levels. Item analysis of the scale using SPSS program resulted in Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .82.

Fear Checklist

The checklist of fear objects has been designed for use of Hindi or English knowing adolescents of India by Kaur (1989). This checklist consists of 182 items, which reflect common human fears of different kind of objects, situations, and activities, which commonly people are afraid for the last few years. The subject has to put a tick mark on the items, which represent objects, situations or activities of which he/she is afraid. One point is given for each tick marked fear object. No point is given when the subject is not afraid. The simple counts of marked fear objects represents the total fear of the subject.

High scores on the checklist indicate higher levels of fear and low scores indicate less fear for common objects, situations, and activities. The reliability of the scale was calculated by split-half method and test retest methods. Applying Spearman-Brown Prophecy formula, the reliability coefficient was found to be .84 and test-retest coefficient was .78, which indicated high stability of scores. The validity of the checklist was determined through concurrent validation procedure and was found to be .78.

Procedure

The tests were administered to the subjects in groups of 6-10 subjects. Data collection was completed in two sessions and each session lasted for about 25-30 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 questions 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 Fear Checklist and they were asked to indicate their responses in the scoring sheet given to them. Whenever the meaning of certain words were not clear to the students, they were made clear to them by one of the test administrators.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Two-way ANOVA was employed to test the significance of difference in the mean fear scores of students with three levels of shyness, grades and medium of instruction. Table 1 presents a summary of the sample distribution. Table 2 presents mean fear scores of students with different levels of shyness, grades, and medium of instruction. Table 3 shows results of two-way ANOVA for mean fear scores of students with different levels of shyness, grades, and medium of instruction.

Distribution of Sample

Table 1

Summary of Scores by Grades and Medium of Instructions (N = 311)

Medium of Instructions	Grades			Total
	VIII	IX	X	
Kannada	42	55	75	172
English	43	45	51	139
Total	85	100	126	311

Shyness Levels, Grades, and Fear Scores

Table 2

Mean Fear Scores of Students Studying in Different Grades with Different Levels of Shyness and Medium of Instructions (N = 311)

Variables		Shyness levels						Total	
		Low		Medium		High			
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Total		49.23	29.05	71.76	31.55	84.50	21.49	62.19	32.30
Grade	VIII	44.75	29.10	66.50	34.74	73.00	1.41	55.43	32.70
	IX	57.73	32.63	77.43	32.82	92.75	14.97	69.51	33.87
	X	42.32	22.61	66.41	27.93	83.25	26.14	56.58	28.76
Medium of Instructions	Kannada	57.42	29.68	78.60	30.07	90.10	20.35	70.53	31.41
	English	40.80	26.00	62.32	31.32	70.50	19.82	51.87	30.45

Students studying in Kannada medium (M = 70.53) were found to have significantly [F (2,305) = 8.065; $p<.05$] higher fear scores as compared to students studying in English medium. Grade-wise, non significant differences were observed in mean fear scores, and the interaction between shyness levels and grades also was found to be non significant.

Shyness Levels, Media of Instruction and Fear Scores

Table 3

Two-way ANOVA for Mean Fear Scores of Students Studying in Different Grades with Different Levels of Shyness and Medium of Instruction (N=311)

Source of Variation	df	F
Shyness levels (A)	2,302	18.91**
Grades (B)	2,302	2.02
Interaction (A x B)	4,302	.14
Medium of Instruction (C)	1,305	8.07**
Interaction (A x C)	2,305	.02

**$p< .01$

Medium of instruction had significant influence over fear scores. Students studying in Kannada medium (M = 70.53) were found to have

significantly [F (2,305) = 8.07; $p<.01$] higher fear scores compared to students studying in English medium. In other words, the students studying in Kannada language (which is a local language) as a medium of instruction found to be more fearful than their counterparts. Grade-wise, non significant difference was observed in mean fear scores, and the interaction between shyness levels and grades was also found to be non significant.

DISCUSSION

The main findings of the present study are:

1. Shyness had a direct relationship with fear - fear scores increased linearly as shyness levels increased.

2. Grade had non significant influence on shyness and fear.

3. Students studying in Kannada medium had more fear as compared to students studying in English medium.

Hypotheses 1 and 3 were accepted and Hypothesis 2 was rejected. Higher levels of shyness resulted in higher fear scores. The results of the present study with reference to shyness and fear are in agreement with studies done abroad. The experience of fear is not a genetic matter; environment tremendously influences the development of fear as well as its expressions in relation to different objects and situations of life (Kaur, 1989). 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). Schroeder (1995) explored the cognitive aspect of shyness and social anxiety with regard to interpersonal perception skills and found that socially anxious subjects had difficulty in social information processing tasks. Shyness was related to cognitive interference as well as poorer performance on the information processing tasks. For shy subjects, social anxiety could be distinguished from general anxiety. Shy adolescents tended to be lower in self-esteem, more introverted, and more anxious than their non-shy counterparts (Lawrence & Bennett, 1992). In a recent study on high school students by D'Souza (2003) revealed that high levels of shyness resulted in higher levels of anxiety. A study by Van-Ameringen, Mancini, and Oakman (1998) after studying 225 patients concluded that both shyness and

behavioral inhibition are associated with anxiety disorders in children and adults. All these factors could lead to increased fear in students with higher levels of shyness. The other important aspect is that students studying in Kannada language as a medium of instruction had higher fear scores, indicating that studying in Kannada medium they may have felt inferior to their counterparts in English medium. Since Kannada language is restricted to Karnataka state and English is a universal language, definitely a kind of apprehensive anxiety may have evoked fear responses.

To conclude, therapists and mental health professionals should recognize the serious need for treatment of shyness, and should develop treatment approaches to liberate the millions of people who are trapped in their silent prisons of shyness. Also, the educationists/policy makers should plan English as a media of instruction from early schooling along with Kannada language.

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