

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACADEMIC ANXIETY AND PERFECTIONISM AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates gender differences in the relationship between academic anxiety and perfectionism among secondary school students. Academic anxiety, characterised by feelings of worry and tension in academic settings, is increasingly prevalent among adolescents and is influenced by perfectionist tendencies. A sample of 400 students (200 boys and 200 girls) from government schools in Ludhiana district was selected through random sampling. Statistical analyses, including descriptive and Pearson's correlation, revealed a low but significant positive relationship between academic anxiety and perfectionism for both genders. However, while self-oriented perfectionism was significantly correlated with academic anxiety in both boys and girls, social-oriented perfectionism showed significance only in boys. These findings suggest that gender moderates the perfectionism-anxiety link, emphasising the need for gender-sensitive interventions in schools. The results have important implications for educators and mental health professionals working with adolescents.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most important psychological characteristics that is closely linked with academic anxiety is perfectionism. Academic anxiety has also been found to be an important psychological issue among secondary school students, influencing their performance, well-being, and motivation. Perfectionism is a tendency to have extremely high personal standards for oneself and to engage in critical self-appraisals (Flett & Hewitt, 2002). While adaptive perfectionism can lead to academic achievement, maladaptive perfectionism tends to result in greater stress and anxiety (Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Notably, gender acts as a moderator for the relationship between perfectionism and academic anxiety, with boys and girls experiencing and expressing perfectionist behaviour differently. Evidence points to female students as being more likely to experience academic anxiety compared to their male peers because they frequently internalise pressure to perform well academically and socially (Putwain & Daly, 2014). Male students, on the other hand, might have more self-oriented perfectionism but also lower reported anxiety because of varying coping strategies (Rice et al., 2011). Identifying these gender-based patterns becomes critical for crafting targeted interventions and support services within schools.

ACADEMIC ANXIETY

Academic anxiety refers to a feeling of tension, worry, or fear specifically related to academic contexts such as exams, classroom performance, and studying. It negatively affects students' learning and academic outcomes. According to Cassady and Johnson (2002), academic anxiety is “a psychological condition in which students experience extreme stress, nervousness, and apprehension during or before evaluation situations.” Spielberger (1980) described anxiety in academic settings as a form of *situational anxiety* that involves temporary emotional reactions to specific academic tasks. It often manifests through physiological symptoms (e.g., rapid heartbeat), cognitive disruptions (e.g., worry and negative thoughts), and behavioural responses (e.g., avoidance of academic tasks). Academic anxiety is also seen as an outcome of students' perceptions of academic pressure and fear of failure. According to Rana and Mahmood (2010), academic anxiety can significantly impair memory, concentration, and academic performance, particularly when the pressure to succeed is internalised.

PERFECTIONISM

Flett and Hewitt (2002) define perfectionism as a multidimensional personality trait involving excessively high personal standards and overly critical self-evaluations. They identify three core dimensions: self-oriented, other-oriented, and socially prescribed perfectionism. According to Frost et al. (1990), perfectionism is characterised by the setting of excessively high standards, concern over mistakes, doubts about actions, and the importance placed on organisation. Their model highlights both adaptive and maladaptive aspects of perfectionism. Stoeber and Otto (2006) describe perfectionism as the pursuit of flawlessness and the setting of high-performance standards, accompanied by critical self-evaluations and concerns over others' evaluations. They propose that perfectionism can be both positive (adaptive) and negative (maladaptive), depending on how it affects motivation and emotional well-being. Slaney et al. (2001) refer to perfectionism as the tendency to demand of oneself an extremely high or even flawless level of performance, regardless of circumstances, which can lead to distress when standards are not met.

OBJECTIVES

- To study the relationship between academic anxiety and perfectionism among secondary school boys.
- To study the relationship between academic anxiety and perfectionism among secondary school girls

HYPOTHESIS

H01 (a) There exists no significant relationship between academic anxiety and perfectionism among secondary school boys.

H01 (b) There exists no significant relationship between academic anxiety and perfectionism among rural secondary school girls.

SAMPLE

The sample of the study comprises 400 secondary students studying in the IX class from government schools. A random sampling technique was employed for the selection of the sample. Out of the total 400 students, 200 were boys and 200 were girls. The sample was taken from schools in the Ludhiana district of Punjab.

TOOLS USED FOR DATA COLLECTION

In order to collect the data, the following tools will be used in the present study:

- Academic anxiety scale for children by Singh and Sengupta (2018)
- Perfectionism scale by Kumar (2020)

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

In order to screen the data for normalcy and to test the hypotheses, the data was analysed with the help of relevant statistical techniques like Descriptive statistics, i.e., mean, median, mode, SD, skewness and kurtosis to study the distribution of data. For Inferential statistics, Pearson's product-moment correlation technique was used to test the hypotheses.

For checking the nature of the distribution of data among secondary school students, values of mean, median, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis were calculated for secondary school boys and secondary school girls. The values are given in Tables 1 and 2 below, respectively:

Table 1: Nature of distribution of data for secondary school students boys (N=200)

Variables			Mean	Median	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Academic Anxiety			11.59	12.00	3.18	-0.246	-0.342
Perfectionism	Self-Oriented Perfectionism	Secondary school students boys (200)	107.22	109.00	10.99	-0.361	0.078
	Social-Oriented Perfectionism		67.14	68.00	8.29	-0.510	0.542
	Total Perfectionism		174.36	177.00	16.91	-0.503	0.289

Table 1 shows the values of mean, median, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis of scores of secondary school boys. The values of mean and median for the dependent variable, academic anxiety, are 11.59 and 12.00, respectively. Since both the measures of central tendency are in close proximity to each other therefore these are normally distributed. The standard deviation was calculated as a measure of dispersion, which came out

to be 3.18. The distribution is negatively skewed as the value of skewness is -0.246. The value of kurtosis is -0.342, which shows that the distribution is platykurtic. Both the values of skewness and kurtosis lie within the permissible limits of chance fluctuation, and the distortion is negligible; therefore, the data can be taken as normally distributed.

The values of mean and median for the independent variable perfectionism are 174.36 and 177.00, respectively. Both these measures of central tendency are in close proximity to each other, which shows that the distribution is quite close to a normal distribution. The value for standard deviation as a measure of dispersion comes out to be 16.91. The value of skewness is -0.503, which shows that the distribution is negatively skewed. The value for kurtosis comes out to be 0.289. Thus, the distribution is leptokurtic and it falls within the accepted limits of chance fluctuation.

The values of mean and median for self- self-oriented perfectionism dimension of are 107.22 and 109.00, respectively. The value for standard deviation as a measure of dispersion comes out to be 10.99. The value of skewness is -0.361, therefore the distribution is negatively skewed. The value for kurtosis comes out to be 0.078. This value is positive; thus, it is a leptokurtic distribution. For the social-oriented perfectionism dimension, the values of mean and median are 67.14 and 68.00, respectively. The value for standard deviation as a measure of dispersion comes out to be 8.29. The value of skewness is -0.510, which shows the distribution is negatively skewed. The value for kurtosis comes out to be 0.542. Thus, the distribution is leptokurtic. The values of skewness and kurtosis lie within the permissible limits of chance fluctuation, which shows that the data is normally distributed.

Since the scores of secondary school students boys for all the variables (academic anxiety and perfectionism) are normally distributed thus it fulfils the condition of parametric statistics.

Table 2: Nature of distribution of data for secondary school students girls (N=200)

Variables			Mean	Median	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Academic Anxiety			12.61	13.00	2.48	-0.408	0.44
Perfectionism	Self-Oriented Perfectionism	Secondary school students Girls (200)	111.14	113.00	9.09	-1.075	1.337
	Social-Oriented Perfectionism		68.94	69.50	6.56	-0.243	-0.155
	Total Perfectionism		180.10	181.00	12.24	-0.747	1.060

Range of Chance Fluctuation of Skewness and Kurtosis -2.0 to 2.0 (Trochim, & Donnelly, 2006; Gravetter & Wallnau, 2014)

Table 2 shows the values of mean, median, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis of scores of secondary school student’s girls. The values of mean and median for the dependent variable, academic anxiety, are 12.61 and 13.00, respectively. Since both the measures of central tendency are in close proximity to each other therefore these are normally distributed. The standard deviation was calculated as a measure of dispersion, which came out to be 2.48. The distribution is negatively skewed as the value of skewness is -0.408. The value of

kurtosis is 0.44, which shows that the distribution is leptokurtic. Both the values of skewness and kurtosis lie within the permissible limits of chance fluctuation and the distortion is negligible; therefore the data can be taken as normally distributed.

The value of mean and median for the independent variable perfectionism are 180.10 and 181.00 respectively. Both these measures of central tendency are in close proximity with each other which shows that the distribution is quite near to normal distribution. The value for standard deviation as a measure of dispersion comes out to be 12.24. The value of skewness is -0.747, which shows that the distribution is negatively skewed. The value for kurtosis comes out to be 1.060. Thus, the distribution is leptokurtic and it falls within the accepted limits of chance fluctuation.

For the independent variable perfectionism, the values of mean and median for the self-oriented perfectionism dimension are 111.14 and 113.00, respectively. The value for standard deviation as a measure of dispersion comes out to be 9.09. The value of skewness is -1.075, therefore, the distribution is negatively skewed. The value for kurtosis comes out to be 1.337. This value is positive; thus, it is a leptokurtic distribution. For the social-oriented perfectionism dimension, the values of mean and median are 68.94 and 69.50, respectively. The value for standard deviation as a measure of dispersion comes out to be 6.56. The value of skewness is -0.243, which shows the distribution is negatively skewed. The value for kurtosis comes out to be -0.155. Thus, the distribution is platykurtic. The measures of central tendency for all dimensions of metacognition are in close proximity to each other. The values of skewness and kurtosis lie within the permissible limits of chance fluctuation which shows that the data is normally distributed. Since the scores of secondary school students girls for all the variables (academic anxiety and perfectionism) are normally distributed thus it fulfils the condition of parametric statistics.

In order to test the hypothesis H01(a) "There exists no significant relationship between academic anxiety and perfectionism among secondary school boys" and H01(b) "There exists no significant relationship between academic anxiety and perfectionism among secondary school girls". Pearson's correlation was worked out and the results are presented in the following table:

Table 3 -Coefficient of correlation between Academic Anxiety and Perfectionism

Group	Variables	Self-oriented Perfectionism	Social-oriented Perfectionism	Perfectionism (Total)
Secondary School Boys (N=200)	Academic Anxiety and Perfectionism	0.15*	0.13*	0.16*
Secondary School Girls (N=200)		0.24**	0.11	0.24**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

The value of the coefficient of correlation between academic anxiety and perfectionism of secondary school boys of 200 students came out to be 0.16, which is significant at the 0.05 level of significance. In the case of dimension-wise analysis, the value of the coefficient of correlation in self-oriented perfectionism came out to be 0.15, which is significant at the 0.05 level of significance. The second dimension is social-oriented perfectionism, which came out to be 0.13, which is significant at the 0.01 level of significance. This shows that there exists a low positive correlation between Academic Anxiety and Perfectionism among rural secondary school students

Therefore, we can say that perfectionism and its dimensions, self-perfectionism and social-perfectionism, have a significantly low positive correlation with academic anxiety in secondary school boys. Therefore, the hypothesis H01(a) "There exists no significant relationship between academic anxiety and perfectionism among secondary school boys stands rejected

The value of correlation for secondary school girls for sample 200 reveals that Academic Anxiety is low, positively correlated with perfectionism came out to be 0.24, which is significant at the 0.01 level of significance. The value of correlation in self-oriented perfectionism which came out to be 0.24 which is significant at the 0.01 level of significance, and in social-oriented perfectionism, the value came out to be 0.11, which is not significant at the 0.01 level of significance. This shows that there exists a low positive correlation between Academic Anxiety and Perfectionism among secondary school girls.

Therefore, we can say that perfectionism and its dimensions, self-perfectionism and social-perfectionism, have a significantly low positive correlation with academic anxiety in secondary school girls. Therefore, the hypothesis H01(b) "There exists no significant relationship between academic anxiety and perfectionism among secondary school girls" and stands rejected.

CONCLUSION

The statistical analysis revealed a low but significant positive relationship between academic anxiety and perfectionism for both genders. However, while self-oriented perfectionism was significantly correlated with academic anxiety in both boys and girls, social-oriented perfectionism showed significance only in boys. The statistical analysis revealed girls showed no significant levels of social perfectionism, while boys showed no significant levels of social perfectionism. This result might be rooted in the social roles and expectations placed on girls, where they may internalize societal pressures differently. Girls might focus more on emotional regulation, self-doubt, or general anxiety rather than on appearing socially perfect. Alternatively, the lack of significance could indicate that girls are either more balanced in their social self-perception or that they distribute their perfectionistic tendencies across different domains (academic, personal, physical appearance) rather than focusing on social approval alone. In contrast, boys might display perfectionism more externally, possibly driven by expectations of achievement, competition, or fear of failure, which might make social perfectionism more noticeable and statistically significant among them. These findings suggest that gender moderates the perfectionism-anxiety link, emphasising the need for gender-sensitive interventions in schools. The results have important implications for educators and mental health professionals working with adolescents.

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