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SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS INFLUENCING THE DEVELOPMENT OF ANXIETY IN PRIMARY SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

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Abstract: This article provides a theoretical analysis of the socio-psychological factors influencing the development and manifestation of anxiety in primary school-aged children. Family relationships, parenting styles, communication with teachers, the psychological climate of the classroom, peer relationships, and children's individual characteristics are examined as important factors associated with anxiety. Particular attention is given to fear, fear of failure, sensitivity to evaluation, and lack of self-confidence that may arise during the process of school adjustment. The article also discusses psychological and pedagogical approaches aimed at reducing anxiety, cooperation between parents and teachers, and recommendations for creating an emotionally safe environment for children. The study is theoretical and analytical in nature and does not claim to have conducted empirical research or obtained statistical findings from a particular sample.

Keywords: primary school age, anxiety, socio-psychological factors, school adjustment, parental attitudes, teachers, peers, emotional safety, psychological support.

Introduction

Entering school represents one of the most important developmental stages in a child's life. During this period, children adapt to new rules, academic responsibilities, assessment criteria, and systems of social relationships. Their social environment expands beyond the family as they begin to interact regularly with teachers, classmates, and the wider school community. These changes contribute to the development of cognitive processes and social experiences; however, under certain circumstances, they may also cause emotional tension and anxiety.

Anxiety is a natural emotional state that can increase alertness in response to unfamiliar or anticipated situations. However, when anxiety occurs frequently, becomes intense, and negatively affects a child's daily activities, academic performance, sleep, or relationships with peers, it requires particular attention. Primary school-aged children are not always able to express their emotions clearly. Consequently, anxiety may manifest through complaints of headaches or abdominal pain, reluctance to attend school, excessive hesitation when completing assignments, fear of making mistakes, or difficulties separating from adults.

The relevance of this topic lies in the fact that children's psychological well-being is not determined exclusively by their individual characteristics. Family communication, parental expectations, teachers' attitudes, mutual respect within the classroom, and the organization of the educational process also influence how children perceive themselves and their environment. Therefore, explaining anxiety solely in terms of a child's stubbornness or shyness is inappropriate. It is essential to examine the situation in connection with the child's family and educational environment.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the major socio-psychological factors influencing the development of anxiety among primary school-aged children and to systematize preventive approaches that can be implemented within families and educational institutions. The objectives include explaining the concept of anxiety, examining the psychological characteristics of this developmental stage, analyzing the roles of family and school environments, describing possible manifestations of anxiety, and developing practical recommendations.

ISSN: 2224-6878 | Pakistan Volume 6, No. 10.

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The article is based on a theoretical and analytical approach. It synthesizes scientific perspectives from psychology and developmental psychology. No claim is made that field research was conducted in a particular school or group of children, that diagnostic instruments were administered, or that statistical indicators were obtained. Before submitting the article for scientific publication, the author should verify bibliographic information, incorporate relevant practical observations or local research where available, and adapt the manuscript to the requirements of the selected journal.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PRIMARY SCHOOL AGE

Primary school age generally refers to the developmental period during which children receive elementary education. At this stage, learning becomes a leading activity, and children acquire experience in obtaining knowledge, completing assignments according to established requirements, checking their work, and evaluating results. At the same time, their self-regulation abilities, volitional qualities, and emotional stability are still developing. Requirements that appear simple to adults may be unfamiliar and challenging for children.

Children entering school often attach considerable importance to teachers' evaluations and attitudes. They seek adult approval and may feel embarrassed about making mistakes or fear appearing unsuccessful in front of classmates. When a child's achievements are measured exclusively by high grades, the child may become more concerned with avoiding mistakes than with the learning process itself. As a result, prolonged hesitation before beginning a new assignment, reluctance to raise a hand despite knowing the answer, or unwillingness to ask for assistance may occur.

Imagination, emotional sensitivity, and responsiveness to adults' opinions also play significant roles at this age. A child may interpret criticism not as feedback concerning a particular situation but as a negative judgment of their personality. Therefore, the way teachers communicate feedback, explain mistakes, and acknowledge children's efforts is particularly important.

Generalizing statements such as "You never do anything correctly" may undermine self-confidence. In contrast, supportive expressions such as "There is a mistake in this part; let us examine it together" present mistakes as a natural component of learning.

Children do not develop at identical rates. Some adapt quickly to new social environments, whereas others require more time, advance explanations, and adult support. Rather than immediately interpreting such differences as problems, it is necessary to consider children's individual characteristics. Nevertheless, when persistent and severe anxiety significantly interferes with academic performance or everyday functioning, consultation with a qualified specialist is advisable.

THE CONCEPT OF ANXIETY AND ITS MANIFESTATIONS

Psychological literature distinguishes between anxiety as an emotional state arising in response to a particular situation and trait anxiety as an individual tendency to experience anxiety frequently across different circumstances. Although these dimensions may interact, they should not be regarded as identical.

For example, experiencing anxiety before an examination may be a normal response, whereas intense fear before nearly every minor assignment may require closer attention.

Anxiety may manifest in several ways. Emotionally, children may experience nervousness, fear, tension, or increased emotional sensitivity. Behaviorally, they may avoid tasks, seek excessive reassurance, repeatedly check their work for mistakes, or resist separation from adults.

ISSN: 2224-6878 | Pakistan Volume 6, No. 10.

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Physical manifestations may include increased heart rate, sweating, abdominal pain, nausea, or sleep disturbances. However, these symptoms may have different causes. Therefore, they should not automatically be attributed to anxiety, and possible medical explanations should not be excluded.

When evaluating the intensity and duration of anxiety, the surrounding circumstances must also be considered. Temporary emotional discomfort may naturally arise when changing schools, experiencing family changes, returning to classes after illness, or speaking in front of classmates.

Important criteria include the frequency of symptoms, their duration, their intensity relative to the child's developmental stage, and the extent to which they interfere with everyday functioning.

Adults sometimes describe anxious children as lazy, stubborn, or excessively attention-seeking. However, avoidance of assignments may reflect fear of failure, concern about ridicule, or anticipation of adult disapproval.

In such situations, punishment or humiliation may aggravate the problem. A more constructive approach involves attempting to understand the child's behavior, asking what makes a particular task difficult, and suggesting small, achievable steps.

THE INFLUENCE OF FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

The family represents the primary environment in which children's earliest social experiences develop. Through interactions with close adults, children learn how to feel secure, express emotions, solve problems, and seek assistance.

When family relationships are characterized by affection, stability, and consistent expectations, children may become more confident in exploring unfamiliar situations. Conversely, constant criticism, humiliation, severe punishment, or unpredictable adult behavior may negatively affect their sense of security.

Parenting style is an important factor. Under excessively authoritarian parenting, children may perceive mistakes not as natural elements of learning but as actions that lead to punishment.

Excessive parental control may restrict opportunities for independent decision-making, potentially causing children to depend on adult approval at every stage. On the other hand, satisfying all of a child's wishes without reasonable boundaries does not necessarily promote the development of coping skills.

A balanced approach combines affection with appropriate expectations and establishes understandable, consistent rules.

Parental expectations regarding academic performance are also significant. Constantly demanding the highest grades, comparing children with others, or presenting mistakes as personal deficiencies may increase anxiety.

Statements such as "Why can't you be like your younger brother?" or "If you do not receive the highest grade, I will be disappointed in you" may encourage children to associate parental affection with academic achievement.

Instead, parents should recognize their children's efforts, acknowledge specific accomplishments, and collaboratively identify ways to correct mistakes.

Family conflicts, divorce, illness of a close relative, relocation, and financial difficulties may also influence children's emotional well-being. However, it would be incorrect to conclude that every such circumstance inevitably produces anxiety.

The impact depends on the child's age, interpretation of the situation, explanations provided by adults, and availability of emotional support.

ISSN: 2224-6878 | Pakistan Volume 6, No. 10.

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Adults should provide truthful, calm, and age-appropriate explanations without making children responsible for adult problems.

Open communication about emotions is beneficial within families. Rather than dismissing a child's feelings by saying, "There is nothing to be afraid of," parents may acknowledge the experience by asking, "Does this assignment seem difficult to you?"

Recognizing emotions does not mean intensifying fear. Instead, it helps children feel understood. Adults can then analyze the situation together with the child and identify a manageable next step.

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH TEACHERS

School is not only an institution for acquiring knowledge but also an environment in which children's social status and self-perceptions develop.

Fair, consistent, and respectful treatment by teachers strengthens children's sense of trust. Conversely, public humiliation, ridicule, comparisons between students, and harsh responses to mistakes may contribute to increased anxiety.

The organization of assessment procedures is equally important. If children receive praise exclusively for final results, they may become motivated primarily to avoid failure.

Recognizing the learning process, effort, and individual improvement promotes a learning-oriented attitude.

This approach does not require lowering academic expectations. Instead, expectations should be clear, children should understand how to achieve them, and opportunities to correct mistakes should be available.

The psychological climate of the classroom also affects anxiety. Ridicule, exclusion, or repeated humiliation by classmates may cause children to perceive school as an unsafe environment.

In such circumstances, simply telling children to solve the problem independently is insufficient.

Teachers should establish clear classroom rules, intervene promptly when disrespectful behavior occurs, and create opportunities for every child to participate in classroom activities.

When teachers notice signs of anxiety, they may conduct a private and supportive conversation rather than questioning the child publicly.

For example, a teacher might say, "Recently, you seem worried before answering questions. Which part feels difficult for you?"

Such questions may help children communicate their concerns.

Teachers should not attempt to make clinical diagnoses. Their responsibility is to discuss observations with parents and school psychologists and create supportive educational conditions.

During school adjustment, familiarizing children with daily routines, classroom expectations, and school facilities in advance may be beneficial.

Explaining assignments step by step, providing simple and clear instructions, and allowing children to ask questions may also reduce emotional tension.

Rather than applying an identical approach to every child, teachers should consider individual needs while maintaining general principles of fairness.

PEER RELATIONSHIPS AND SOCIAL COMPARISON

During primary school age, peers' opinions increasingly influence children's self-evaluation.

Playing with friends, being accepted into groups, and participating in collaborative assignments contribute to the development of social skills.

ISSN: 2224-6878 | Pakistan Volume 6, No. 10.

IF: 14.91 | 2026 http://waerasia.org/index.php/ijtar

At the same time, conflicts with classmates and difficulties finding a place within the peer group may intensify anxiety.

When children are frequently compared with others, they may become accustomed to evaluating themselves as either good or bad students.

Such comparisons may prevent them from recognizing their individual strengths.

Because children's abilities, interests, and developmental rates differ, monitoring personal progress is especially important.

For example, completing an assignment today with limited assistance that could not be completed independently yesterday also represents developmental progress.

Peer rejection and ridicule may constitute important social sources of anxiety.

Children experiencing these difficulties may avoid recess, withdraw from group activities, or become distressed before attending school.

However, such behaviors should not automatically be interpreted as proof of peer-related problems. Careful conversations with the child and clarification of the situation through different sources are necessary.

Collaborative classroom activities can help children develop skills such as taking turns, listening to others, and resolving conflicts peacefully.

Children should understand that asking for assistance is not a sign of weakness and that helping classmates is preferable to laughing at their mistakes.

Social skills are acquired not only through verbal instruction but also through observing adults' interpersonal behavior.

INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS AND SUSCEPTIBILITY TO ANXIETY

Social environments do not influence all children in the same way.

Temperament, emotional sensitivity, previous experiences, self-confidence, and problem-solving abilities contribute to children's responses to unfamiliar situations.

Some children adapt slowly to noisy or unfamiliar environments, whereas others approach new situations with curiosity.

These differences should not be classified as inherently positive or negative. The important objective is to identify the conditions that facilitate each child's adjustment.

Previous negative experiences may also influence perceptions of subsequent situations.

For example, a child who was laughed at while answering a question in front of the class may become afraid of participating again.

Instead of immediately forcing the child to speak publicly, teachers may first provide opportunities to respond in pairs, then in small groups, and eventually in front of the entire class.

This gradual process aims to strengthen confidence through safe experiences without dismissing the child's fear.

Self-esteem also plays an important role.

Children with low self-confidence may interpret difficulty completing an assignment as evidence of personal inability.

Adults can divide tasks into smaller stages, acknowledge completed steps, and gradually reduce assistance.

Specific feedback is often more constructive than excessive general praise.

Instead of saying, "You are very intelligent," an adult might say, "You tried two methods to solve the problem and reached the correct answer."

Such feedback helps children recognize the connection between their actions and outcomes.

ISSN: 2224-6878 | Pakistan Volume 6, No. 10.

IF: 14.91 | 2026 http://waerasia.org/index.php/ijtar

Sleep, rest, physical activity, and daily routines are also associated with emotional well-being.

Fatigue and insufficient rest may make it more difficult for children to cope with everyday challenges.

Therefore, anxiety cannot be adequately explained by parenting or school-related factors alone.

A comprehensive understanding of a child's condition requires consideration of physical health, family circumstances, and school experiences.

THE ROLE OF PARENTS AND EDUCATORS IN IDENTIFYING ANXIETY

The primary purpose of identifying anxiety is not to label children but to understand the situations in which they experience difficulties and determine appropriate forms of assistance.

Parents and educators may begin by observing behavioral changes, including refusal to attend school, increased crying, changes in sleep patterns, excessive hesitation when completing assignments, or withdrawal from peer interactions.

A single symptom is insufficient for drawing conclusions. Its duration, recurrence, and relationship to particular circumstances must be considered.

Observations should be recorded as specifically as possible.

Rather than stating, "The child is extremely anxious," a more informative description would be, "During the past two weeks, the child has cried before dictation exercises and expressed fear of making mistakes."

Such records should be used to understand children's needs rather than to blame or control them.

It is also important to avoid unnecessarily sharing personal information.

Open-ended questions are appropriate when communicating with children.

Examples include: "Which part of the school day is most difficult for you?", "What helps you when you feel worried?", and "Who makes you feel better when you talk to them?"

Children should not be forced to respond when they are not ready.

Some children may find it easier to express emotions through drawing, play, or short statements.

Adults should listen without interrupting and avoid immediately responding with criticism or solutions.

If anxiety persists, intensifies, or significantly interferes with academic performance, sleep, eating, family life, or peer relationships, consultation with a school psychologist or qualified child mental health professional is necessary.

When physical symptoms are present, potential medical causes should also be evaluated.

Parents and teachers should not independently establish clinical diagnoses or interpret online screening results as definitive conclusions.

When psychological assessment is necessary, qualified specialists should use scientifically supported methods appropriate to the child's age, language abilities, and circumstances.

Assessment results should help identify the child's strengths and support needs.

Confidentiality, respect for the child's dignity, and parental awareness are essential principles throughout this process.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES TO REDUCING ANXIETY

Reducing anxiety requires strengthening children's sense of safety, stability, and predictability within their everyday environments.

ISSN: 2224-6878 | Pakistan Volume 6, No. 10.

IF: 14.91 | 2026 http://waerasia.org/index.php/ijtar

Consistent daily routines, clear explanations of assignments, advance information about changes, and predictable adult responses help children develop a sense of control over their circumstances.

The objective is not to eliminate every difficulty but to develop children's ability to cope with challenges.

The first approach involves recognizing and naming emotions.

When a child says, "I am afraid," adults should avoid dismissing the feeling.

Instead, they may respond, "I understand that you feel worried before answering."

The situation can then be examined together, and simple strategies such as slowing breathing, taking a short break, or dividing assignments into smaller steps may be attempted.

Breathing exercises may be helpful, but they should not be considered a universal solution to all anxiety-related difficulties.

The second approach involves completing tasks gradually.

For example, a child who fears speaking in front of classmates may initially write an answer in a notebook, then communicate it privately to the teacher, later speak within a small group, and eventually address the entire class.

Each stage should correspond to the child's abilities and consider their readiness and willingness to participate.

Increasing demands too rapidly or through coercion may intensify anxiety.

The third approach involves changing attitudes toward mistakes.

Teachers and parents should present mistakes as natural components of learning rather than personal deficiencies.

When children provide incorrect answers, adults can acknowledge their efforts and explain the next step.

This does not require praising incorrect work. The essential principle is to explain mistakes while preserving the child's dignity.

The fourth approach involves supporting children's independence.

Adults should neither complete every assignment on behalf of children nor leave them entirely without assistance.

Questions such as "Which part can you complete independently, and where do you need help?" encourage active participation.

When small achievements are consistently recognized, children may develop more realistic and positive perceptions of their abilities.

The fifth approach involves cooperation between families and schools.

Parents and teachers should exchange specific information about children's difficulties without assigning blame, avoid contradictory expectations, and agree on a common support plan.

For example, if a child experiences severe anxiety before an examination, teachers may explain instructions in advance, while parents can establish regular preparation and rest routines instead of using threats or excessive repetition at home.

PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARENTS

Parents can support the reduction of children's anxiety by developing several simple but consistent habits.

First, it is beneficial to dedicate a short period each day to listening to children's emotions.

Conversations should not focus exclusively on grades or incomplete assignments.

Questions such as "What made you happy today?" and "Which situation was difficult?" may encourage children to express their experiences.

ISSN: 2224-6878 | Pakistan Volume 6, No. 10.

IF: 14.91 | 2026 http://waerasia.org/index.php/ijtar

Second, parents should avoid comparing their children's achievements with those of other children.

Instead, they should consider progress in relation to the child's previous abilities and performance.

Third, expectations should be clear and developmentally appropriate.

Assigning too many tasks simultaneously or establishing unrealistic demands may cause children to feel helpless.

It is important to organize tasks sequentially and provide sufficient time for rest.

Fourth, parents should avoid immediately blaming children when discussing school-related difficulties.

If a child refuses to attend school, adults should attempt to identify the underlying reason.

The child may have difficulty understanding lessons, experience conflicts with classmates, fear a teacher, or face another challenge.

Accusing children of making excuses before identifying the cause may discourage them from seeking assistance.

Fifth, parents' emotional states are also important.

During stressful situations, adults may benefit from taking a short break before continuing a conversation rather than shouting or threatening.

This provides children with a practical example of emotional regulation.

Parents are not expected to remain calm under every circumstance; however, they can apologize after making mistakes and restore positive relationships.

Finally, when anxiety persists or seriously affects children's functioning, professional consultation should not be delayed.

Seeking professional assistance represents a responsible response to children's developmental and emotional needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHERS AND SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

To establish psychological safety within the classroom, teachers should treat all students respectfully, avoid using mistakes as opportunities for public humiliation, and create favorable conditions for asking questions.

Clearly explaining lesson objectives and assessment criteria, dividing complex assignments into manageable components, and allowing sufficient thinking time are beneficial practices.

Rather than immediately criticizing children who struggle to answer questions, teachers may provide guiding questions or additional time.

When classroom rules are developed collaboratively with children, students may better understand their purpose.

Rules should clearly address respectful communication, avoiding interruptions, refraining from laughing at mistakes, resolving conflicts without insults, and treating classmates who request assistance with respect.

Responses to rule violations should be consistent, proportionate, and non-humiliating.

School psychologists may support children displaying signs of anxiety through individual conversations, consultations with parents and teachers, and additional assessments when necessary.

Psychological activities may help children learn to identify emotions, divide problems into manageable steps, request assistance, and develop constructive self-talk.

However, instead of applying identical exercises to all children, specialists should consider each child's age, individual needs, and circumstances.

ISSN: 2224-6878 | Pakistan Volume 6, No. 10.

IF: 14.91 | 2026 http://waerasia.org/index.php/ijtar

School-based prevention should not focus exclusively on individual children.

Classroom relationships, teachers' communication styles, assessment practices, and cooperation with parents must also be examined.

If anxiety is associated with ridicule or humiliation in the classroom, teaching breathing exercises alone will not fully resolve the problem.

The harmful social environment itself must also be addressed.

Professionals should carefully protect children's personal information and share necessary details only with individuals directly involved in providing support.

Labels such as "problematic," "cowardly," or "weak" should be avoided.

Support strategies should also recognize children's strengths, interests, and existing supportive relationships.

DISCUSSION

The theoretical perspectives examined in this article indicate that anxiety among primary school-aged children cannot be adequately explained by a single cause.

Family relationships, school conditions, peer groups, and individual characteristics interact with one another.

For example, a child who is particularly sensitive to mistakes may experience greater anxiety in a classroom characterized by frequent criticism.

Conversely, supportive teachers and parents may help the child overcome such difficulties.

Therefore, understanding anxiety requires not only observing children's behavior but also analyzing the conditions in which that behavior occurs.

Completely eliminating anxiety is not always a realistic or necessary objective.

In certain circumstances, a moderate level of anxiety may encourage preparation and increased attention.

Problems arise when anxiety restricts children's abilities, contributes to school avoidance, causes withdrawal from social interactions, or interferes with everyday responsibilities.

Consequently, practical interventions should focus not on suppressing anxiety as an inherently negative emotion but on developing children's ability to recognize, understand, and regulate it.

The theoretical and analytical nature of this article also establishes an important limitation.

The factors discussed are interpreted through general psychological literature, and their prevalence within a particular region or school has not been determined.

Future empirical studies may employ interviews with parents and teachers, developmentally appropriate diagnostic instruments, and systematic observations of school environments.

Such investigations should ensure compliance with ethical requirements, parental consent, children's safety, and confidentiality of personal information.

Cultural and social contexts should also be considered when examining this topic.

Families may differ in their parenting beliefs, educational expectations, and requirements placed on children.

Therefore, rather than transferring an approach that is effective in one environment directly into another, it is more appropriate to adapt its fundamental principles to local needs.

Throughout this process, children's dignity, safety, and right to development must remain central considerations.

CONCLUSION

ISSN: 2224-6878 | Pakistan Volume 6, No. 10.

IF: 14.91 | 2026 http://waerasia.org/index.php/ijtar

The development of anxiety among primary school-aged children is a multifactorial process involving interactions among family relationships, parenting approaches, communication with teachers, classroom psychological climate, peer relationships, and individual characteristics.

Certain manifestations of anxiety may be natural during adjustment to school life.

However, when such experiences persist or significantly interfere with academic performance, sleep, and social relationships, they should not be ignored.

The analysis suggests that blaming children, comparing them with peers, publicly humiliating them, and severely punishing mistakes may intensify anxiety.

Conversely, consistent rules, attentive listening to emotions, presenting mistakes as natural elements of learning, and helping children complete tasks gradually may strengthen self-confidence.

Cooperation between families and schools represents an important preventive condition.

Parents and educators should communicate about children's difficulties without assigning blame, recognize their strengths, and seek assistance from school psychologists or other qualified professionals when necessary.

When assessing anxiety, it is important to avoid unsupported diagnoses and investigate potential medical causes when physical symptoms are present.

Overall, supporting the psychological well-being of primary school-aged children requires more than providing academic instruction.

It is essential to create an environment in which children feel valued, heard, and emotionally secure.

Within such an environment, children are better positioned to learn without excessive fear of mistakes, overcome challenges, and gradually demonstrate their abilities.

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