

# Phobia: Impact on Academic Outcomes of Students Aged Between 6 Years to 18 Years - A Case Study

Gururaj Ganapati Gouda<sup>1</sup>, & Laveena D'Mello<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, College of Social Science & Humanities, Srinivas University, Mangalore, Karnataka, India.

Email: [gururajitgi@gmail.com](mailto:gururajitgi@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, College of Social Science & Humanities, Srinivas University, Mangalore, Karnataka, India.

Email: [lavyoronha@gmail.com](mailto:lavyoronha@gmail.com)

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## Phobia: Impact on Academic Outcomes of Students Aged Between 6 Years to 18 Years - A Case Study

Gururaj Ganapati Gouda<sup>1</sup>, & Laveena D'Mello<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, College of Social Science & Humanities, Srinivas University, Mangalore,  
Karnataka, India.

Email: [gururajitgi@gmail.com](mailto:gururajitgi@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, College of Social Science & Humanities, Srinivas University,  
Mangalore, Karnataka, India.

Email: [lavynoronha@gmail.com](mailto:lavynoronha@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Most of us have experience of fear at any point of our lifetime. When this common fear turns to severe anxiety can be named as a phobia. The phobia is one of the psychological disorders which imbalance our day today's wellbeing. Normally children have frequent experience of fear and few of them suffer from severe anxiety disorder. The influence of the external world is the main cause of any phobic problems.

**Result:** As per this case study common fear or phobic disorder among children is affecting the academic performance of the children and their day today's activities. It is highly recommended to expertize the teachers and educate the family members to have an insight on phobic disorders and its impacts on children. Most therapeutic approaches are currently being used for children for the prevention of phobic and anxiety disorders are individual child-focused treatments. Family members or teachers generally play a little or indirect role in the treatment process. However, the role of teacher's and family member's in identifying and managing anxious children will help the child for being potential in fighting against such disorders. Specific assessment, including the interview, reporting instruments, other-report measures, behavioural observations, monitoring, and physiological assessment are the tools in finding solutions for phobic problems among children.

**Conclusion:** The above case study is giving us an experimental idea on deferent types of anxiety disorders and their impact on the child's academic outcome. However the impact of phobia is not only on the academic outcome of the child but also on its behaviour and social wellbeing, it will also disturb the child in its day today's activities. The timely approach with several therapies will help the child to cope-up with the phobic problems and balance well performance in academic as well as in social activities.

**Keywords:** Children, Phobia, Fear, Anxiety, Family & Teachers.

### 1. INTRODUCTION :

Phobia is a type of anxiety disorder, defined as persistent and excessive fear of an object or situation. The phobia typically results in a rapid onset of fear and it will be present for more than six months in affected person. Data from deferent research show the frequency of mild phobia to be 76:9/1000 and of severe phobia to be 2.2/1000 of the general population [1]. Identifying risk factors in childhood is one of the essential parts of the teachers, parents and health care providers in preventing these phobic problems. This information on several common fear and phobic disorders also enables health care providers to predict which individuals are most likely to develop the disorder [2]. There no any one particular cause of phobias, but there are several factors that might play a major role behind them. Particular incidents or situation, such as experiencing a lot of fear on a plane at childhood might later develop as phobia of flying. Factors in the family environment, such as parents who are very worried or anxious, can have an effect on the way child cope with anxiety in later life. Some people seem to be born with a tendency to be more fearful than others. If we have a strong reaction, or panic attack,

in response to a particular situation or object, and we find this embarrassing or people around you react strongly, this can cause us to develop more intense anxiety about being in that situation again. Long-term stress can also cause feelings of anxiety and depression, and reduce the child's ability to cope in particular situations. This can make the child feel more fearful or anxious about being in those situations again, and over a long period, could lead to a particular child develop a phobia [3].

## **2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY :**

Fear is one of the commonest problems of the people. When the common fear leads to severe condition, where the person affected by such fear feel unable to cope with his day today's activities and experience several anxiety problems can be called as phobia [4]. To identify the several dimensions of fear and phobia, the following objectives are been discussed.

- (1) To explore the causes behind the fear and phobic disorders.
- (2) The main aim of the study is to identify the status among children suffering from a phobia.
- (3) To note the difference between common fear and phobic disorders.
- (4) To find out the need for a therapeutic approach in helping the children suffering from fear and phobia.
- (5) To explore the effect of phobia on the academic outcome of the children.

## **3. ANXIETY AND PHOBIA IN CHILDHOOD :**

Anxiety and phobia are common and under-treated disorders that lead to significant functional impairment among people [5]. There are several scales of self-assessment of anxiety disorders such as Spence Children's Anxiety Scale (SCAS) is a child self-report measure designed to evaluate symptoms relating to separation anxiety, phobia, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic, agoraphobia, generalized anxiety and fears of physical injury etc [6]. Boys and preadolescents were found to have more direct experiences than girls or adolescents by phobic and anxiety disorders [7]. The fear of injury, the fear of accidents, and the fear of negative evaluation are the few areas where children experiences severe problem leading to anxiety or phobic problems. Simple phobias most of the time are influenced by the experience of panic attacks. Anxiety sensitivity is associated with several phobic disorders such as agoraphobia, simple phobia, panic disorder, and substance abuse increasingly in the young population. Anxiety sensitivity is strongly associated with fearfulness. There is some preliminary support for the hypothesis that anxiety sensitivity is a risk factor for panic disorder [8]. As per social evaluation fear increased between childhood and adolescence [9]. There could be a direct effect of maternal mood on foetal brain development, which affects the behavioural development of the child [10]. So anxiety and phobias are most equal and affective disorders associated with several social and psychological factors. Cognitive and behavioural strategies are highly used for these distressing child-anxiety problems and help them to cope with their regular activities [11].

## **4. PHOBIA :**

A phobia is an extreme level of fear or anxiety, influenced by a particular situation (such as going outside) or object (fear of spiders). The researchers noted that approximately 90% of all young population who refuse to go to school have some form of fear [12]. Many of us have fears about a particular object or situations, and this is perfectly normal. In childhood social phobia (SP) is the commonest problem and associated with varying forms of impairment. The cause of social anxiety disorder in children is often complex, involving both genetic and environmental factors. Shyness in young children may also be a possible precursor to social anxiety later in life, although not the sole antecedent [13]. The symptoms of a phobia involve experiencing intense fear and anxiety when faced with the situation or object that we are afraid of. If the phobia is severe, thinking about the object of the phobia can also trigger these symptoms. It has a significant impact on how we live our day-to-day life. Experiencing this type of acute fear is extremely unpleasant and can be feeling of afraid. It may make us feel stressed, out of control and distracted. It may also lead affected person to feelings of embarrassment, anxiety or depression. Phobias can develop around any object or situation. The phobias can be mainly categorised into two groups they are as below.

## 5. SPECIFIC (SIMPLE) PHOBIA :

The results suggest that simple phobia is a highly common disorder. The simple phobia does not transmit extended risk for other phobic or anxiety disorders. The increased risks among the deferent phobias are consistent with the distinction between simple phobia, social phobia, and agoraphobia [14]. Some of the simple phobias are Animals (such as dogs, insects, snakes), the natural environment (such as heights, water, darkness), situational (such as flying, going to the dentist, tunnels), body-based phobias (such as blood, vomit, injections) and Sexual phobias (such as sexual acts themselves). To understand this simple or specific phobia, we can have a look in to below case study [15].

**Case report:** A girl aged 11 years old was referred by her mother, informing that girl suffering from fear, since several weeks. Parents are scared seeing her reactions for darkness, being alone and thinking that something will harm and kill her. She started refusing to go to school and not allowing parents to leave her alone. Day by day the girl also expressed poor performance in her exams and lost interest in classroom learning. The above incident destroyed her mental wellbeing to cope up with her studies and social involvement.

**Symptoms:** The girl had an experience of trembling, sweating, hot flushes or chills, difficulty breathing, tightness in the chest and lack of sleep. These are the symptoms were noticed in her during a counselling session.

**Causes of the problem:** One day in the evening after the school hour she was walking towards her home, when she could come towards the gate and touch the lock of the gate to open it she also had a deferent touching experience that she ever had before. Within a few seconds she could notice a green coloured snake on the gate wall, the girl realized something she touched was a snake. She started shivering, screaming and ran away from the gate. After this incident, she started experiencing feeling unable to cope with her day today's activities and go out of the home.

**Treatment:** In the counselling session, she was diagnosed with a simple phobia (fear of animals) and treated with behavioural therapy (CBT). After several sessions with a therapeutic approach, the girl showed better improvement and her involvement towards people and learning also was noticed [16].

## 6. COMPLEX PHOBIAS :

Complex phobias one of the major type of phobias having a more disruptive or disabling impact than simple phobias. These phobias tend to develop when we are adults. Two of the most common complex phobias are social phobia and agoraphobia.

### (1) SOCIAL PHOBIA:

If we are suffering from social phobia (also called social anxiety or social anxiety disorder), we will feel an extreme sense of fear and anxiety in social situations. This may be connected to any one of specific situations, such as public speaking, or it may be that we are afraid of talking to or being around other people in any functions, or general gathering.

**Case report:** A girl aged 7 years, was referred by the parents with the problem of not talking to anyone. She also was noticed with fear in involving with unknown people and irregular to the school. After several months of the problem, parents have taken a decision to change her school and admitted in the deferent school. Even after admitting into deferent school the problem was increased.

**Symptoms:** The girl also had a problem of sleeping and bed wetting. Trembling, Sweating and shivering also been noticed in the girl. Isolation was also one of the major symptoms in her problem.

**Causes of the problem:** During the counselling session the causes behind her problem was noticed. When she was in 6 years old (first standard) was physically abused by one of her class teachers. The teacher was rash of girl's mistake in spoiling her classmate's notebook and had hit hardly using rubber scale on her leg and to the back. She was also pulled out of the classroom and made stand for an hour time. This incident made that little girl develop a deep fear on teachers as well as school. After some time she stopped talking to people and refuse to go to school.

**Treatment:** After several sessions, she was treated with Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). With the help of parent's and teacher's girl was encouraged to come for school and continues counselling sessions influenced her to develop social interaction and involvement. By these approaches, she showed good development in her learning [17].

## (2) AGORAPHOBIA:

Agoraphobia is a fear of open spaces, but it is more complex than other phobic disorders. The essential feature of agoraphobia is that we will feel anxious about being in places or situations that it would be difficult or embarrassing to get out of, or where we might not be able to get help if we have a panic attack [18].

**Case report:** A boy 17 years old was referred by his father with the complaint of not willing to leave his home and come outside. As per father's information, the boy was expressing his helplessness of convincing his parents that if I go out of the home police will arrest him. So to escape from the police he wanted his parent's support allowing him to be in the home itself by stop going to college.

**Symptoms of the problem:** During the visit to his home for the counselling session with the boy some information of his problem were noticed that he had a severe fear of getting arrested by the police, with the symptoms like he had been homebound for the last 4 months. He had a fear that something bad will happen if he will go out of his home. He stayed mostly in his room and did not even allow any one of his family members to leave him alone at the home. He believed that he might get arrested or bad name in the village if he leaves the safety of his home. The boy was quite fearful of police, thinking he may go to permanently jailed. The boy also expressed symptoms include, heart palpitations, sweating, shaking, shortness of breath, heart attack like the pain in the chest, vomiting, chills or hot flashes, feeling of helplessness, and a sense of being out of control. After collecting the several information and symptoms on the problem the counsellor could come to the conclusion that boy was suffering from "Agoraphobia".

**Causes of the problem:** One day the boy was informed that one of his friends died in a suicide. The boy was shocked to hear this information about his friend's death and scared. He was also unknown of the situation and details on the death of his friend. When he read a newspaper and watch TV could notice several reasons for death and few of his friend's friends were arrested with the reason of being influenced for the suicide. The boy was already scared of police with few past experiences of witnessing people get beaten by police. He was also aware of the approach after arrest in the police station by watching the live incidents and movies. These repetitive incidents have created severe panic attack in the boy after the death incident of his friend thinking that even I am also going to get arrested and beaten by the police so he wanted to be safe at the home with the family members.

**Effect on academic:** The boy had poor attendance in his college since four months he was unable to attend the class, stay focused on his study, and pay attention towards exams and also a sudden decrease in his academic results.

**Treatment:** The boy was treated with behavioural therapy and exposure therapy. His family members were educated to carry out the proposed plan. He was also encouraged in the beginning to leave his room for few minutes to few hours. After a few days, he was able to walk up to the garden in front of his house. Slowly and gradually he was encouraged to go to different places each day in his village. At one point he was escorted up to the college. Finally, he managed to build enough courage and will power to step out of his home into the college [19]. Agoraphobia is one of the most complex phobic disorder which directly harm the person's day today's activities. The case study above is giving us an idea of this disorder that how harmful it is. So expertized approach with right therapy in right time may help the person affected.

## 7. SIMPLE FEAR :

Fear can be considered as activation of a defensive motivational system [20]. Normally, in students it is found neither fear of success nor fear of failure in their academics with difficulty to affect examination performance. Fear of success correlated positively with the fear of failure. Overall, fear of failure may influence performance more substantially than fear of success in the academic outcome of the students [21].

**Case report:** A boy aged 14 years old studying in VIII standard was referred by his class teacher reporting that he is good in study, active in both curricular and extra-curricular activities but very poor in scoring good marks in exams. The boy also use to actively involved in classroom learning, being good to friends and teachers, complete all the school work in time and using the maximum time for self-study at home. But the boy uses to score very fewer marks in every exam and multiple



subjects. After the deep evaluation of the case, the counsellor noticed that boy was suffering with “fear of exam”.

**Symptoms:** The boy referred was also expressed several symptoms such as behaviour change, isolation, sweating, rapid heartbeat and shivering are deferent symptoms experienced by the boy suffering from the problem.

**Causes of the problem:** Parents always use to tell the boy that, we have paid a lot of fees for your study and also he was aware of the financial problem in the family. The academic pressure made in the school is also one of the reasons behind his fear of exams. Even though he was good in the study but thinking on the result that he may fail and make parents sad he developed a fear of exams. He was also scared of teachers that if he fails in the exams teachers will punish him. Such feelings influenced and he developed a fear himself which destroyed his ability in academic performance. So during exams, he falls into depression and feels complicated in writing exams.

**Treatment plan:** After the diagnosis of the problem, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) was implemented and family members were educated to encourage the boy towards building confidence and believe in his strength of the study. After three counselling sessions, the boy developed his courage and slowly showed improvement in his performance in the exams [22]. Even though we consider fear as a defensive system, its impact on the academic performance of the children is negative. Herby, we can come to conclusion by evaluation of the above case study that common fear among us is not good which discourage and distract us from our situational or day today’s activities. So it is important in finding a motivational environment in overcoming from the effect of fear to have healthy and encouragement in our life.

## 8. FINDINGS & SUGGESTIONS :

Phobias are common and increasingly prevalent, often associated with serious role impairment, and usually experienced by people untreated. Focused research is needed to investigate the consequences and barriers to seeking support in finding the right approach for prevention [23]. The above case studies are seriously highlighting that the children suffering from fear or phobia are affected in their academic performance and day today’s activities. It is highly recommended to expertize the teachers and educate the family members to have an insight on phobic disorders and its impacts on children. However, the role of teachers in identifying and managing anxious children will help the child for being potential in fighting against such disorders. Specific assessment, including the interview, report instruments, other-report measures, behavioural observations, monitoring, and physiological assessment are the tools in finding solutions for phobic problems among children [24]. Most therapeutic approaches are currently being used for children for the prevention of phobic and anxiety disorders are individual child-focused treatments, Family members generally play a little or indirect role in the treatment process. But the majority of the children are prevented by the effect of such disorders with the right approach and support from the family as well as teachers [25]. This study suggests that anxiety disorders, and generalized social phobia, are associated with premature withdrawal from school or develop school phobia among children. Further researches are required to explore new methods for early identification and treatment of these disorders in children to enable them to reach their full potential in academic achievements [26].

## 9. CONCLUSION :

Phobia has several impacts on the physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing of the people. These impacts directly play a major role in deciding the child’s participation in its learning and academic outcome. The above case studies are giving us an experimental idea on deferent types of phobia and its impact on the child’s academic outcome. However the impact of phobia is not only on the academic outcome of the child but also on its behaviour and social wellbeing, it will also disturb the child in its day today’s activities. The timely approach with several therapies will help the child to cope-up with the phobic problems and balance well performance in academic as well as in social activities [28-29]. The Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) is one of the effective therapies which can be used in treating the child affected by phobic disorders [27].

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