A Comparative Study of the Level of Stress in Married Women with Children and Without Children in the District of Muzaffarpur

Ranjana Kumari

Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, B. R.A. Bihar University, Muzaffarpur, India

Abstract

A woman plays multiple roles in an Indian household. One of the most important roles from amongst the host of roles that women play is that a mother. Taking care of children, right from the birth to the time that they get financially independent is considered to be one of the most important roles of women. In many cultures, including the Indian culture, the success of parents is measured by how well their children are doing in the world. Such high levels of responsibility towards their children are bound to attract a high level of stress in mothers. The present study is an attempt to quantify the level of stress induced in women because of parenthood. Women with children in different age groups and different stages of life are taken into consideration and a comparison in their anxiety levels carried out. Since the nature of the anxiety that these mothers are exposed to are not specific to an incident therefore it is hypothesized that the correct classification of their anxiety, if any, would be the General Anxiety Disorder or the GAD. The questionnaire GAD - 7 is used to quantify the level of GAD in women.

Key Words: Anxiety, Women, General Anxiety Disorder, Muzaffarpur, GAD - 7, Roles of Women, Indian Society, Motherhood, Parental Anxiety, Children

Introduction

Defining Anxiety

There exist multiple definitions of anxiety, changing one context to another. However, the most commonly used definition from psychological studies' perspective would that anxiety is the central nervous system's response to a sense of threat or fear. It affects the human personal in the form of inner turmoil often with physical and emotional manifestations. Anxiety is a more generalize and on-specific for of ear. Fear always corresponds to a particular stimulus, whereas, anxiety is a more general, move vague, less specific variation of fear. Some common symptoms of anxiety are restlessness, fatigue, problem in concentration, and muscular tension. Anxiety is often studied as a part of abnormal psychology (Seligman and Walker (2004) as it is not considered to be a normal reaction to a perceived stressor although many feel it occasionally.

Anxiety, depending upon its nature and the physiological and emotional impact that it has, it further classified into multiple

types. The most common of these types are listed as below:

1) Generalized Anxiety Disorder

2) Phobias

3) Social Anxiety Disorder

4) Panic Disorder

5) Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

In the context of our current study, wherein we are trying to quantify the level of anxiety that parental pressures bring about in women, the most relevant form of anxiety would be the General Anxiety Disorder (GAD). GAD is defined as an anxiety disorder characterized by excessive, uncontrollable and often irrational worry.

Understanding Parental Anxieties

Most of the South-east Asian societies stress a lot of importance on the parent-child relationship, often equating the success of a child in worldly ways with the success of the parents. It is widely believed that the core responsibility of the parents in their old age. This often leads to parents attaching a lot of value to the living conditions of the children with their own perception of achievements in their life. This can lead to unduly high levels of anxiety in parents on important junctures of the lives of children.

For the purposes of this study, the following key events of a child's life were identified as key stressors in the life of parents. These would be- admissions of children in first school, important exams of children, first job of children and marriage of children. It is expected that at times of such stressors, the levels of anxiety in parents would be significantly higher than under other normal circumstances. It would be interesting to also study this from the child's perspective and gauge their levels of stress to understand the kinds of performance pressures created on children because of parental expectations. However, this particular line of study is not within the scope of current work.

Understanding the GAD - 7

Spitzer, Kroenke and Williams (2006) in their celebrated work on the measurement of General Anxiety Disorder, prepared a self reported questionnaire that is widely used to measure the levels of General Anxiety Disorder. This is widely known as the GAD- 7. It's a questionnaire used for screening and severity measuring of generalized anxiety disorder (GAD)/ GAD - 7 has seven items, which measure severity of various signs of GAD according to reported response categories with assigned points. Assessment is indicated by the total score, which made up by adding together the scores for the scale all seven items, which measure severity of various signs of GAD according to reported response categories with assigned points. Assessment is indicated by the total score, which made up by adding together the scores for the scale all seven items.

The scale uses a normative system of scoring as shows below with question at the end qualitatively describing severity of anxiety over the past 2 weeks. The scale below is the indicative response that the individual submit corresponding to the 7 questions in the GAD - 7.

- Not at all (0 points)
- Several days (1 point)
- More than half the days (2 points)
- Nearly every day (3 points)

The questions asked in the GAD - 7 are as below:

Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems	1 (Not at all)	2 (Several days)	3 (More than half the days	4 (Nearly everyday)
Feeling nervous, anxious or on the edge				
Not being able to stop or control worrying				
Worrying too much about different things				
Trouble relaxing				
Being so restless that it is hard to sit still				
Being easily annoyed or irritable				
Feeling afraid as if something awful may happen				

The scoring is done by taking the sum of all the seven responses. The total on the GAD - 7 can be interpreted as below:

Total Score	Interpretation
5-9	Mild Anxiety
10-14	Moderate Anxiety
15-21	Severe Anxiety

Objective of the Study

The objective of the study is to measure the level of General Anxiety Disorder in the women in Muzaffarpur district of Bihar that can be attributed to issues related to the life event of their children.

Methodology

Respondents from similar socio-economic groups but with children at different stages of life were picked for the study. A group of 50 women each was taken for each of the identified groups as per the life stages of Children. Each of these respondents was given a PDS (Personal Data Sheet) and was administered the GAD - 7 for quantification of the level of Anxiety.

The five groups of the respondents were as mentioned in the tablet below:

Sl.no.	Life stage of Children	No. of respondents
1	No children	50
2	First school	50
3	Major exams	50
4	First job	50
5	Marriage	50

Sampling

Samples of women belonging to the same socio-economic but in different categories of stressors were collected. A total of 250 samples were collected across the 5 categories. All the 250 respondents were

Data Analysis

than administered the GAD - 7 questionnaire to gauge the level of their General Anxiety Disorder.

The sampling was done with no biases and was completely randomized.

The data collected from the GAD - 7 is as shown in the table below:

Sl.No.	Category	Samples	Average GAD-7 score
1	No Children	50	3.9
2	First School	50	12.9
3	Major Exams	50	11.7
4	First Job	50	6.7
5	Marriage	50	16.9

The frequency table of the distribution of the levels of stress for different categories of the respondents is also presented below:

Sl.No.	Category	Imperceptible	Mild	Moderate	High
1	No children	36	8	4	2
2	First School	3	12	20	15
3	Major Exams	6	18	18	8
4	First job	30	10	6	4
5	Marriage	0	4	14	32

Results and Conclusions

On the basis of the study conducted, following can be concluded:

1) The biggest cause of anxiety in parents is the marriage of their children. This is to be expected as marriages are given a lot of importance in the India social context and are considered to be one of the most important events of the life of an individual.

2) The smallest amount of GAD was found in people with no children (yet to become parents). This implies that all children related key events of life act as stressors in the life of parents.

3) The GAD - 7 scores show a clear dip on the first job of children. This is again to be expected as children moving into professional life is a matter of pride for parents.

References:

[1] Robert L. Spitzer, MD; Kurt Korenke, MD; Janet B. W. Williams, DSW; Bernd Lowe,
(2006), MD, Ph.D. A brief measure for assessing generalized anxiety disorder. The GAD-7, Arch Intern Med .; 166 : 1092-1097

[2] Aikins, D. E., Craske, M.G. (2001), Cognitive Theories of Generalised Anxiety Disorder. Psychiatric Clinics of North America, 24(1), 57-74, vi

[3] Barlow, D.H. (2002), Anxiety and its disorders : The nature and treatment of Anxiety and Panic (2nd Ed), New York GuilFord Press

[4] Bradley, B.P., Mogg. K., White, J., Groom, C., de Bono, J. (1999). Attentional bias for emotional faces in General anxiety disorder. British Journal of Clinical Psychology, 38   (pt 3), 267-278

[5] Well, A . (2002), GAD, metacognition and mindfulness : An information processing analysis. Clinical Psychology Science and Practice, 9, 95-100

[6] Bouras, N., Holt, G. (2007), Psychiatric and Behavioral Disorders in Intellectual and Development Disabilities (2nded.). Cambridge University Press

[7] Seligman, M.E.P.; Walker, E.F.; Rosenhan, D.L., (2000), Abnormal psychology (4th ed.), New York : W.W. Norton & Company

[8] Torpy, J.M., Burke, A. E. & Golub, R.M. (2011). Generalized anxiety disorder. JAMA- *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 305(5), DOI : 10.1001/Jama.305.5.522