

## THE IMPACT OF EXAMINATION FEAR UPON SECONDARY SCHOOLS STUDENTS' SELF-ESTEEM:AN INVESTIGATIVE STUDY FROM KARACHI

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### ABSTRACT

*This Mixed method research study investigates the impact of exam fear on secondary school students' self-esteem, Across gender, Test anxiety questionnaire developed by Suinn and Self-esteem scale by Rosenberg was adapted from the literature, which contained 26 items, for finding out various factors which influence exam fear and its impact on students' self-esteem. A semi structured interview was conducted among 5 teachers, 5 students and 5 parents to find the factors which causes the exam fear among the students. Data were collected from 4 private Matriculation and Cambridge schools in Karachi. Results from regression analysis revealed that there is statistically significant impact of exam fear on the secondary school students' self-esteem. The factors which caused the exam fear may include failure in the exam, parental expectation, traditional teaching methods, learning styles of students and difficult syllabus to study. The study further informs the responsibility of teachers and educators to help the students develop self-esteem, improve 21st century skills such as creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and communication among the learners rather than meaningless rote learning and how to cope up with exam fear. The study recommends the student centered approach which serves a purpose of providing good classroom activities and encourages students' motivation, interest and added performance. The study further concludes recommending further researches in qualitative manner to find the reasons for students' exam fear and humbly encouraging the schools and educators to teach and make learning an enjoyable activity.*

**Keywords:** mindfulness, exam fear, test and exam

### INTRODUCTION

Examinations are the essential component of any schooling structure. These examinations are the doorway for higher education which leads to their career growth and development. Students with good grades are always welcomed by the society and they often get admission in the desired colleges on merit basis. Unfortunately it becomes hard and stressful condition for the students who do not get good grades in their examination. Our society is achievement oriented and has a special mind set on scoring marks

Maryam, Dahar & Tahira (2017) inform about the cognitive element of exam fear is linked to the mind and thinking progression of the learners. Diverse causes or the factors are associated with the exam fear of learners which can be performance, parents' expectation, future prospects and admission requirements for higher education and so on. Learners are expected

to work their best bring possible achievements to seek college admission and future jobs. Students remained constantly worried about their performance due to school, peers and parents and society which constantly reminding about bringing their best performances.

### **Problem Statement**

On reviewing the literature, the researcher found many articles on exam fear among the undergraduate and graduate students, medical and nursing students but very few of the researches are on secondary school students. The researcher wished find out how the exam fear affect the secondary school students. Initial studies have braced, with great dimensions of sign, that by following the techniques of formative assessment in a classroom can result in better performance of the individual learners specially the weak students (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & William, 2003).

### **Research Objective**

1. To identify the factors which causes examination fear among the secondary school students.’
2. To investigate the impact of examination fear on secondary school students’ self-esteem.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the factors which causes examination fear among the secondary school students’?
2. What is the impact of examination fear on the secondary school students’ self-esteem across gender?

### **Aims of the Study**

The study aims to investigate on the impact of examination fear on secondary school students’ self-esteem across gender and system of education. The results of this research study would yield key recommendations to various stakeholders such as students, parents and teachers in the teaching and learning process and minimise stress or fear of exams and will boost the self-esteem level of the learners.

### **Limitation of the Study**

The limitations of the study are described next.

1. The research is limited to conduct on the impact of exam fear on the secondary school students’ self-esteem across gender only.
2. Only two schools from Matriculation and Cambridge system were part of this research.
3. Convenience and random sampling was done due to time constraints as several schools were located in different parts of Karachi.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The study aimed to protect the participants from any psychological and physiological harm. In addition, it would maintain the confidentiality of each participant’s data and encourage voluntary participation along with the participants’ right to withdraw from the research study at any time.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Self-esteem and its Importance**

According to Rosenberg (1965), individual with high self-esteem designates that one compliments and considers oneself worthy. In general, self-esteem refers to how an individual sense about or how an individual appraise about himself. This evaluation serves as an important role because it will affect an individual's attitudes and behaviors. Additionally, there is a lot of differences in the characteristic of low and high self-esteem people. Low self-esteem people tend to underestimate themselves, and feeling themselves undeserved to be successful. According to Ciarrochi, Heaven and Fiona (2007) self-esteem is an important aspect of once life. If a student believes that he or she is respected they really care about whatever they do in the life. Higher level of self-esteem helps them to be better decision makers. One of the study conducted by Aryana in 2010 on relationship between self-esteem and academic achievements resulted in positive.

### **Factors which Causes Exam Fear among the Children, Students and Scholars**

The reasons for exam fear could be failing in the examinations, May be due to parents' pressure, parents, over expectation of students, too much expectation from teachers, schools, low self-esteem and when a student's thinks he /she will not get marks like his classmate

### **Exam Fear and Self- Esteem**

Alam 2014) inform that there is positive correlation between exam fear and self-esteem among the learners while the male students display more test anxiety than their counterpart female students who experience lessor test anxiety. Whereas another study conducted in Turkey among the 724 high school students by Sari, Bilek and Celik (2017) show their research proved that there was a negative correlation between test anxiety and self-esteem and the female students displayed more test anxiety than the male students and the students who demonstrated higher self-esteem had low level of exam fear therefore confirm that examinations increases exam fear among the learners and it lowers their self-esteem particularly the female students.

Research conducted among 320 grade XII students from rural and urban boys and girls from Darbhanga town revealed three different aspects and association between test anxiety and self-esteem. The lower the test anxiety the. higher the academic achievements and vice versa the higher the test anxiety the poorer the academic performances among the boys and girls from both rural and urban areas. Similar manner, there was a positive association between self-esteem and academic performance among the learners while there was negative correlation between test anxiety and self-esteem. Another significant surprise was that the male students with minimum test anxiety shown superior level of self-esteem and academic accomplishments. On the whole, urban students established lower level of test anxiety while the rural students exhibited higher test anxiety level (Alam, 2014).

Mary, Gregory, Franlin and Sheeba (2014) also reveal that the test anxiety level of students who appear for the board exams in Tamil Nadu had amplified specially among the male students and the students who belong to the nuclear family displayed higher level of test anxiety and therefore it is suggested to employ psychologists to help the students with their issues.

### **Theoretical Framework:**

The present research follows the theory of test anxiety by Mandler and Sarason (1952). The research demonstrated that the fear of examination invariably resulted in a performance in evaluation situation. According to that theory. "Examination fear is unbearable and the

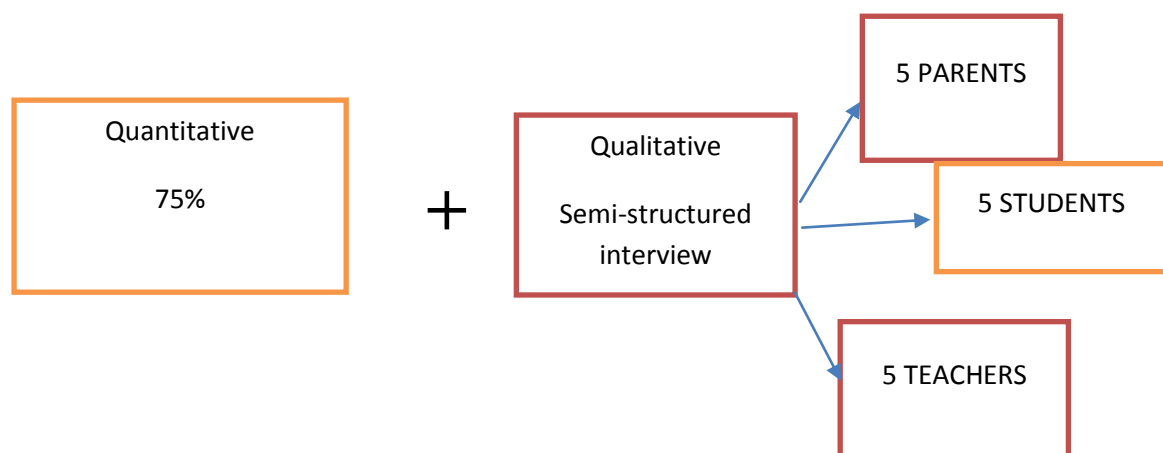
performance of the highly anxious person is lowered in the examination situation. The anxious individual worries during examinations, and may even engage in daydreaming to some extent. As a result concentration can be seriously affected.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

A survey questionnaire, test anxiety by Suinn, R.M. (1969) and self-esteem scale by Rosenberg (1965) was adapted and used to gather data for the quantitative data analysis and was also used a semi structured interview for the qualitative aspect of the research.. The research tool was developed by Suinn in 1969 and the questionnaire comprised of a five-point Likert scale, which was filled in by the secondary school students to show their perspective on exam fear and its impact on students' self-esteem.

### Mixed Method Type



### Research Hypothesis

#### Ho<sup>1</sup>

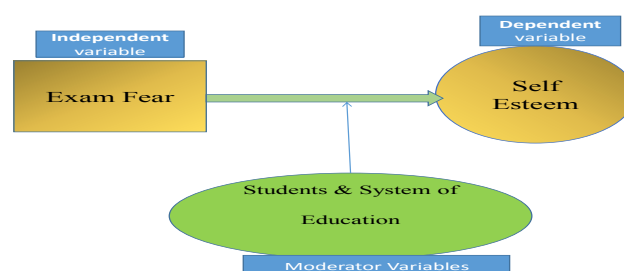
There is no statistically significant impact of examination fear on Secondary school students' self-esteem.

**Table 1. Measure of the Reliability of each Subscale**

| Subscales   | Cronbach's Alpha | No. of Items |
|-------------|------------------|--------------|
| Exam fear   | .770             | 16           |
| Self-esteem | .839             | 10           |

### Variable of this Study

Dependent Variable: Self esteem      Independent Variables: Exam fear  
 Mediating variables: Boys and girls (students) and system of education



*Sample for the Quantitative Analysis*

Population from the study is from schools of south Karachi which is Saddar and Cantonment area. The study has selected the secondary school students from two of the private Matriculation and two of the private Cambridge schools from south Karachi. Sample involves a total of 138 plus 15 participants out of which 66 of them are female and 72 are male students.

*Sample for Qualitative Analysis*

The qualitative analysis involves a total of 15 participants. 5 students, 5 teachers and 5 parents are included for a semi-structured interview to find out the factors which causes the exam fear among the students.

*Sampling Procedure*

The researcher used a convenient random sampling technique due convenience, time availability and accessibility. The cross sectional administration of the test anxiety and self-esteem questionnaire was administered directly to the 138 students of the four school after a brief explanation of how to fill the survey questionnaire. The semi structured interview was conducted among the 15 participants through telephonic conversation due to the prevailing heat and the participants' convenience and availability.

**Data Analysis**

Quantitative data from the questionnaire was analysed through Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) 22 through regression analysis to measure the impact of exam fear on secondary school students' self-esteem whereas the semi structured interview was themed for the various factors which caused the exam fear among the students.

**DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS****Table 2. Gender and Self-esteem**

|             | Gender | N  | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|-------------|--------|----|------|----------------|-----------------|
| Self-Esteem | male   | 72 | 3.15 | .736           | .087            |
|             | female | 64 | 3.44 | 1.238          | .155            |

The above table 2 displays statistical evidence on the level of self-esteem across gender of the secondary school students. The male students demonstrated lower level of self-esteem (3.15) in comparison to the female students who displayed a better level of self-esteem (3.44)

**Table 3. Gender and Fear of Exam**

|              | Gender | N  | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|--------------|--------|----|------|----------------|-----------------|
| Fear of Exam | male   | 72 | 3.37 | .531           | .063            |
|              | female | 64 | 3.55 | .565           | .071            |

The above table 3 exhibits the proof of the degree of exam fear across gender of the secondary school students. The male students (3.37) demonstrated low degree of exam fear than the female students who displayed higher degree of exam fear (3.55).

**Regression Analysis**

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant impact of exam fear on secondary school students' self esteem .

**Table 4. Model Summary**

| Model | R                 | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1     | .280 <sup>a</sup> | .078     | .072              | .975                       |

a. Predictors: (Constant), Fear of Exam

**Table 5. ANOVA**

| Model        | Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F      | Sig  |
|--------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|------|
| 1 Regression | 10.997         | 1   | 10.997      | 11.568 | .001 |
| Residual     | 129.282        | 136 | .951        |        |      |
| Total        | 140.279        | 137 |             |        |      |

a. Dependent Variable: Self-esteem, b. Predictors: (Constant), Fear of Exam

According to the above table 5 ANOVA the regression model is statistically significant because  $F = 11.568$  and the significant value ( $< .05$ )

**Table 6. Coefficients**

| Model        | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients |       | Sig  |
|--------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|------|
|              | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      | t     |      |
| Constant     | 1.569                       | .510       |                           | 3.074 | .003 |
| Fear of Exam | .508                        | .149       | .280                      | 3.401 | .001 |

a=Dependent Variable

**Null Hypothesis**

There is no significant impact of exam fear on secondary school students' self- esteem. Here, the null hypothesis is rejected as the t value is greater than 2 and the significant level is  $< 0.05$ . Therefore it is concluded that this regression model is statistically significant to reject the null hypothesis. Which mean there is definite impact of exam fear on secondary school students' self-esteem.

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \epsilon$$

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 (\text{Fear of Exam}) + \epsilon$$

$$Y = 1.569 + .280 (\text{Fear of Exam}) + \epsilon$$

If there is 1% increase in Fear of Exam, there will be 2.8% change in students' self-esteem

**Some of the Factors Which Causes Exam Fear****Failure in Exams:**

Kurt, Balci and Kose (2014) inform about the main reason for exam fear is the failure in exams. A study conducted by them with 376 participants proved that failing in exam was the significant cause for the exam fear among the students.



### ***Lengthy Course, Difficult Syllabus and Poor Teaching***

Parents and students often spoke about the poor teaching methods available in their children's schools furthermore they complained about the difficult subject taught with lengthy course works. Thakur (2016) confirms that the examination phobia or fear is one of the most shared emotional disorders in school-aged children and the reason can be the poor preparation for the examination either by the teachers or by the students themselves.

### ***High Expectation and Excess Pressure from the Parents***

Thakur (2016) confirms that the parents' expectation and constant pressure forces the students to feel exam fear and the symptoms of it could be visually seen among the students.

### ***Learning Styles of Students***

The teachers in their views informed that the learning styles and preparing for exam of each student differ from other. The students some times are not bothered about the preparation for exams and wait till the commencement of exam.

## **DISCUSSION**

A research conducted by Alam (2014) confirm the same finding that there is positive correlation between exam fear and self-esteem among the learners while the male students display more test anxiety than their counterpart female students who experience lessor test anxiety. Whereas another study conducted in Turkey among the 724 high school students by Sari, Bilek and Celik (2017) show their research proved that there was a negative correlation between test anxiety and self-esteem and the female students displayed more test anxiety than the male students and the students who demonstrated higher self-esteem had low level of exam fear therefore confirm that examinations increases exam fear among the learners and it lowers their self-esteem particularly the female students.

The expectation from parents, syllabus burden, traditional teaching, meaningless rote learning, and learning styles difference may create and increase exam fear among the students and this eventually lower the self-esteem of students. A professor from the University of Munich in 2017 inscribes about the manner the students' sense unrest earlier to the examinations. Some of the students may perspire while other may also feel different way of stress. This kind of exam fear has been greater than before as there are more exams happening now. Higher level of self-esteem supports all the available encouraging things in the life. Some of them like being true-self, accommodating new challenges in life, being confident about uncertainty, being extra strong, Knowing everything, Being dedicated, Accepting oneself. Therefore it is highly recommended for parents and teachers to boost the self-esteem level of students

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Qualitative research recommended to find out the in-depth reason for exam fear.

### **Recommendation for Schools and Teachers**

The school administrators are recommended to motivate teachers to use student centered approach in teaching in the classroom to develop critical thinking and analysis by participating in mathematical activities from their teachers so that the students will be able to learn mathematics effectively and efficiently.

**CPD:** Continuous professional developments for teachers are recommended for the practical, innovative and current pedagogical approaches which may cater to the individual differences of students. can use a variety of techniques such as cooperative learning, practical

application, demonstration, math corners, A teacher's self-efficacy, competency, motivational attitude and other factors are important while teaching to learners. The teacher's constant encouragement is useful in motivating students towards learning. Furthermore, teachers need to encourage the quiet and shy students to motivate them to excel in their self-esteem and self-efficacy. Teachers can also assign some good students who can guide and help their peers who need additional attention and explanation. Teachers should also give relevant support and guidance to the parents about the importance of education so that they can help their children.

### **Recommendation for Learners**

The researcher recaps that it is important for learners to understand the importance of knowledge, facts and skills in daily life as well as in academic and professional life. The students must also pay proper attention in conducive classrooms and develop interest towards learning.

### **Recommendations for Parents**

Parents should be encouraging and supporting to their children not to force them to get high percentage of marks rather help the students to get conceptual understanding.

### **CONCLUSION**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century learners must be taught to obtain skills such as collaboration, communication, creativity and critical thinking rather than getting good marks in their exams. Teachers and parents should consider, develop and encourage the students to have higher self-esteem for the future.



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