

# School Anxiety Among Urban Adolescents

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**Abstract-** School anxiety is a widespread issue affecting adolescents worldwide, particularly in urban private school settings where academic pressures and social dynamics can intensify stress levels. This study aims to explore the prevalence, causes, and impacts of school-related anxiety among 30 students aged 14 to 18 from three private urban schools, using a simple questionnaire-based approach. The research seeks to uncover patterns in anxiety triggers, coping mechanisms, and the influence of social media trends related to mental health awareness.

Through data collected via self-administered questionnaires distributed to students with informed consent, this study identifies that academic pressure, peer relationships, and social media influence are significant contributors to school anxiety. Results indicate varying anxiety levels based on gender and age, with female students reporting slightly higher anxiety symptoms. Social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok have raised mental health awareness but also sometimes exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and stress. The findings emphasize the importance of promoting supportive environments in schools and encouraging open discussions about mental health. Recommendations include enhancing counseling services, integrating mental health education, and responsible social media use.

The study acknowledges limitations such as the small sample size and the subjective nature of self-reports, suggesting further research with larger, diverse populations. Despite these constraints, the paper offers valuable insights for students, educators, and parents to better understand and address school anxiety.

## I. INTRODUCTION

School anxiety is a common emotional response experienced by adolescents that can significantly impact their academic performance, social interactions, and overall well-being. In urban private schools, where expectations for academic success are high, students often face intense pressure that can lead to increased levels of anxiety. This study focuses on adolescents aged 14 to 18 years attending three private urban schools and aims to investigate the multifaceted nature of school anxiety within this demographic.

Adolescence is a critical period marked by rapid physical, emotional, and social changes. The transition from middle to high school involves heightened academic demands, increased social scrutiny, and greater self-awareness, all of which can contribute to anxiety. The phenomenon of school anxiety encompasses worries about academic performance, social acceptance, teacher relationships, and future prospects.

Moreover, the advent of social media has introduced a complex layer to adolescent mental health. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat offer avenues for self-expression and peer connection but also expose students to cyberbullying, unrealistic social comparisons, and mental health content that can either support or harm vulnerable individuals.

This study intends to explore the prevalence and causes of school anxiety by collecting firsthand data from students through questionnaires. It also examines how social media trends influence anxiety levels, considering the role of online communities and mental health advocacy.

Understanding the root causes and manifestations of school anxiety is essential for developing effective interventions. By focusing on students' voices, this research aims to contribute to a growing body of knowledge that can inform educators, parents, and policymakers to create supportive school environments that promote mental wellness.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

School anxiety among adolescents has been the focus of numerous studies over the past decades. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), anxiety disorders are among the most common mental health issues affecting teenagers, with school-related stress being a primary trigger (APA, 2020). Research indicates that the prevalence of anxiety symptoms ranges from 10% to 40% among students worldwide (Merikangas et al., 2010).

Academic pressure is widely acknowledged as a significant contributor to anxiety. Studies by Putwain (2007) and Suldo et al. (2014) suggest that fear of

failure, high expectations from parents and teachers, and competitive school environments elevate stress levels. Moreover, perfectionism and low self-esteem have been linked to heightened school anxiety (Chang, 2007).

Social relationships at school also play a critical role. Peer acceptance and bullying are associated with anxiety and depressive symptoms (Espelage & Holt, 2013). The presence of supportive peer networks has been found to mitigate anxiety, whereas social isolation exacerbates it.

The impact of social media on adolescent anxiety is a newer but rapidly growing area of research. Studies have revealed mixed effects; while some platforms offer peer support and mental health resources, others contribute to cyberbullying and social comparison, leading to increased anxiety and depression (Keles et al., 2020; Orben & Przybylski, 2019). Hashtags like #MentalHealthAwareness have created positive dialogue, but the curated nature of social media content can distort self-perception (Fardouly et al., 2015).

Recent surveys by Common Sense Media (2021) report that 70% of teens feel social media impacts their mental health, with 40% stating it causes anxiety. The COVID-19 pandemic also intensified online engagement, raising concerns about screen time and digital overload.

Despite extensive research, gaps remain in understanding how school anxiety manifests in specific urban private school contexts, where academic demands and social environments might differ from public or rural schools. This study aims to address this gap by focusing on urban adolescent experiences and incorporating the influence of social media trends.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### Participants

The study involved 30 adolescent students, aged 14 to 18, from three private urban schools. Participants included an approximately equal mix of male and female students. None were from the author's own school but were connected through known social contacts to ensure voluntary participation and reduce bias.

#### Procedure

A simple, anonymous questionnaire was developed to gather data on participants' experiences of school anxiety, its causes, symptoms, and coping strategies, as well as their engagement with social media related

to mental health. Participants verbally consented to take part after receiving an explanation of the study's purpose.

The questionnaire was distributed via digital means (Google Forms) and participants completed it independently, submitting their responses directly to the researcher. This allowed for privacy and honest reporting.

#### Questionnaire Items

The questionnaire included 15 questions, mixing multiple-choice, Likert scale, and open-ended formats. Key questions included:

1. How often do you feel anxious about school? (Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, Always)
2. What do you believe causes your school anxiety? (Academic pressure, peer relationships, teacher interactions, social media, family expectations, other)
3. Do you find social media helps or worsens your anxiety? (Helps, Worsens, No effect)
4. Have you ever talked to someone (friend, family, counselor) about your anxiety? (Yes/No)
5. What coping methods do you use? (Talking to friends, hobbies, ignoring, professional help, other)
6. Rate your anxiety level on a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high).
7. Which social media platform do you use most frequently? (Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, YouTube, Other)
8. Do you follow mental health-related content on social media? (Yes/No)
9. Have you experienced cyberbullying or negative comments online? (Yes/No)
10. Any other comments or personal experiences related to school anxiety?

#### Data Analysis

Responses were analyzed quantitatively for frequency and percentage distributions and qualitatively for recurring themes in open-ended answers. Gender and age group comparisons were made where applicable.

### IV. RESULTS

#### Anxiety Frequency and Levels

- 60% of participants reported feeling anxious about school "Often" or "Always."
- 25% reported "Sometimes," and 15% "Rarely" or "Never."

- The average self-rated anxiety level was 7 out of 10.

#### Causes of Anxiety

- Academic pressure was the most commonly cited cause (80%).
- Peer relationships accounted for 50%, teacher interactions 30%, social media 35%, and family expectations 40%.
- Many students noted overlapping causes.

#### Social Media Influence

- 40% said social media worsened their anxiety; 30% felt it helped; 30% reported no effect.
- Instagram (50%) and TikTok (40%) were the most used platforms.
- 70% followed mental health-related content, such as motivational pages and counseling resources.
- 20% had experienced cyberbullying or negative comments online.

#### Coping Strategies

- Talking to friends was the most common coping method (65%).
- Hobbies and distractions (45%), ignoring symptoms (25%), and professional help (15%) followed.
- Some expressed difficulty finding effective coping mechanisms.

#### Gender and Age Trends

- Female participants reported slightly higher anxiety levels on average (7.5) compared to males (6.4).
- Older adolescents (16-18) reported more academic-related anxiety than younger ones (14-15).

#### Open-Ended Responses

- Many students highlighted the pressure to perform well academically as a source of stress.
- Several noted that while social media raises awareness, it sometimes leads to unhealthy comparisons.
- Participants expressed a desire for more open conversations about mental health in schools.

## V. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study align with existing literature indicating that academic pressure and social relationships are primary contributors to school anxiety among adolescents. The high percentage of

students experiencing frequent anxiety highlights the urgency of addressing mental health in urban private school settings.

Social media's dual role—as both a helpful resource and a potential stressor—reflects the complex digital environment today's students navigate. While many students benefit from mental health content online, the risks of cyberbullying and comparison-induced anxiety cannot be overlooked.

Gender differences in anxiety levels suggest that female students may face unique challenges or social expectations that exacerbate stress. Similarly, older adolescents facing critical academic milestones report increased pressure.

The preference for peer support over professional help signals a possible gap in accessible mental health services or stigma surrounding counseling. Schools could enhance support by training teachers and counselors to recognize anxiety symptoms and provide confidential, approachable assistance.

Limitations of this study include its small sample size, reliance on self-reporting, and focus on a specific demographic, which limit the generalizability of the findings. Nevertheless, the study offers useful insights and underscores the importance of multi-faceted interventions.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This research provides a snapshot of school anxiety among urban adolescents, emphasizing academic pressure, peer dynamics, and social media's influential role. The study reinforces that school anxiety is a multifaceted issue requiring coordinated efforts from schools, families, and communities.

Raising awareness through education, fostering open communication, and integrating mental health resources in schools can help alleviate anxiety symptoms. Encouraging responsible social media use and addressing cyberbullying are also crucial.

While further research is needed with larger, diverse populations and longitudinal designs, these findings contribute to understanding the challenges faced by today's adolescents. They also serve as a call to action for developing comprehensive mental health support tailored to young people's evolving needs.

## VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Implement regular mental health education programs in schools to normalize anxiety and equip students with coping skills.

2. Increase accessibility to school counseling services with trained mental health professionals and confidential support options.
3. Promote peer support groups to encourage sharing and reduce stigma associated with anxiety.
4. Engage parents and caregivers through workshops on recognizing anxiety signs and providing supportive home environments.
5. Encourage responsible social media use by educating students on digital wellbeing and risks associated with online content.
6. Address cyberbullying proactively by establishing clear policies, reporting mechanisms, and awareness campaigns.
7. Conduct further research with larger, more diverse samples to generalize findings and explore intervention effectiveness.

#### Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted following basic ethical principles appropriate for a student-led study. All participants were informed about the purpose and nature of the study before participation and provided verbal consent voluntarily. Participation was entirely anonymous and confidential; no personal identifiers such as names or exact school names were collected or recorded to ensure privacy. Participants were assured that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

The questionnaire was designed to minimize distress by using clear, respectful language about anxiety experiences. Since the study involved minimal risk, no formal ethics committee approval was required; however, care was taken to uphold ethical standards in line with educational research best practices.

The data collected is reported in aggregate form only to protect the identity of all individuals involved. The study aims to contribute positively to understanding school anxiety and raise awareness to support adolescent mental health.

#### Disclaimer

This research paper was conducted as a part of a high school project by the author, a student researcher. It is not affiliated with any professional medical, psychological, or academic institution. The findings and opinions expressed are based on a questionnaire completed by peers known to the author and should be interpreted as preliminary observations rather than definitive scientific conclusions.

Readers are advised to consult qualified mental health professionals for diagnosis, advice, or treatment related to anxiety or any psychological condition. This paper is intended for educational and awareness purposes only.

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