

<https://doi.org/10.53032/tvcr/2025.v7n4.43>

Exam Anxiety: Cause and Effective Strategies for Managing

Dr. Rakesh Kumar Singh

Assistant Professor,

P. G. Dept. of Psychology,

Rajendra College, Chapra (Saran) Bihar.

Abstract

Exam anxiety, a significant concern for students, surpasses mere nervousness, leading to excessive worry and physical symptoms that impair test performance. While some stress can motivate, severe anxiety hampers preparation and expression of knowledge, particularly under high-stakes conditions like university admissions. Effective management strategies, including thorough preparation, changing negative thoughts, and physical regulation, are vital. Implementing tools like deep breathing can help students maintain calm during exams, enabling their knowledge to guide performance rather than anxiety.

Keywords: Exam anxiety, Management, Beneficial, Nervousness.

Introduction

Exam anxiety is a common and serious issue faced by students at all levels of education. It goes beyond normal nervousness and leads to excessive worry, physical symptoms, and difficulties in thinking, which can harm test performance. Although a bit of stress can help motivate students, severe anxiety can disrupt their preparation and stop them from showing what they really know and can do. The pressure of important academic tests, like those for university admission or professional certification, adds to this stress. This situation makes it necessary for students to find effective ways to manage their anxiety to succeed in school and maintain their overall health. Proper management strategies are important for dealing with this type of anxiety because they help students cope and perform better in high-stakes situations. To address this issue, it is crucial to understand its nature, recognize its symptoms, and develop practical techniques to control it.

Exam Anxiety

Many students feel anxiety during exams, which means they worry about their results. If this anxiety motivates them to work hard and achieve good grades, it can be beneficial. However, if exam anxiety hinders their ability to perform well, it becomes a problem. The roots of exam anxiety often begin in childhood. As students have more exam experiences, especially

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with poor outcomes, their anxiety can increase significantly. there are different definitions of exam anxiety were given –

According to Zeinder M¹ - “Exam Anxiety is a combination of physiological over arousal, tension, and somatic symptoms along with worry, dread, fear of failure and catastrophizing that occur before or during situations.”

According to Andrews, B & Wilding, J. M - “Exam Anxiety is a physiological condition in which people experience extreme stress, anxiety and discomfort during and/or before taking a test.”

According to Salend, S. J. - “Exam (Test) Anxiety can have broader consequences, negatively affecting a student’s social emotional and behavioral development, as well as their feeling about themselves and school.”²

From above definitions we can say that Exam anxiety is when students feel stressed before, during, or after exams. This psychological state disrupts their learning process due to mental stress and can lead to feelings of tiredness.

Symptoms Of Examination Anxiety : -

Examination anxiety can lead to various symptoms that may occur before, during, or after exams. Such as :-

Emotional : - Feelings of apprehension, discomfort, and overwhelm can lead to panic attacks and terror. This can also result in despondency, helplessness, and emotions like regret or humiliation.

Physical: - Increased sweating, lightheadedness or a spinning sensation, changes in appetite, and sleep alterations are physical symptoms. These can include eating too little or too much.

Cognitive: - It highlights the difficulty some people face in remembering or understanding important information. It also mentions irrational or harmful beliefs that may arise. Additionally, individuals may become overly focused on their failures or embarrassments, comparing themselves negatively to others during assessments. Lastly, it notes that some people can remember exam answers even after the exam has ended.

Behavioural: - Walking quickly or appearing irritated, being socially isolated, and obsessing over education are poor study habits. Procrastination before exams and not studying can lead to failure. Some students did not attend exams, and even when they understood the material, they made small errors. Many left the exam early or before finishing, which contributed to their difficulties. These behaviors severely affect their academic performance.³

Causes of exam anxiety

Exam anxiety can be caused by several factors including lack of preparation, fear of failure, a poor history with tests, dislike for certain subjects, and the home environment.

Lack of preparation - Exam anxiety usually comes from feeling unprepared. Common reasons for this include poor study habits, cramming the night before the exam, bad time management, and not organizing notes and homework properly. Being unprepared can lead to increased stress and worry about exams.

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Fear of failure - Exam anxiety arises when students worry about how well others are performing and fear the consequences of not doing their best. This pressure to succeed can motivate some, but it can also harm those who connect their self-worth to their test results. The stress can become overwhelming, especially when people feel that their value depends on their performance. It's important to recognize these feelings and find ways to manage them effectively.

Poor test history - Exam anxiety can stem from worrying about past test results. Negative experiences can impact future test performance, especially for academic students.

Prejudice towards subject - Some students dislike certain subjects and focus more on their favorites, causing anxiety.

Home environment - Home environment plays a key role to create whatever beliefs in students mind. More love, poor social economic status, more comparisons with other student creates exam anxiety in students mind.

Some additional exam anxiety causes are listed below -

- The association of grades and personal worth
- A feeling of a lack of control
- A teacher embarrassing a student
- Being placed into a course above one's ability
- Fear of alienation from parents, family and friends due to poor grades.
- Timed tests and the fear of not finishing the test.

In-Exam Day Management and Exam-Taking Adjustments

Feeling a little nervous before a exam is normal and can actually help you focus better. However, exam anxiety involves worry and self-doubt that can hurt your performance and make you unhappy. This type of anxiety can happen to anyone, whether you are in grade school, high school, college, or working and need to take exams for career advancement or certification. It's important to recognize that while some nervousness is helpful, too much anxiety can be harmful.

Here are some actions you can take that may help lower your exam anxiety:-

Learn how to study efficiently - Your school might have study-skills classes to help you learn study methods and test tips. Regular practice will help you feel more relaxed before tests.

Set up a consistent pretest routine - Learn what works best for you and stick to the same routine before each test. This will reduce your stress and help you feel prepared.

Strategic Approach to Difficult Questions - A common anxiety trigger during exams is encountering a very difficult question early on, leading to premature closure of the test-taking process due to panic. Test takers should employ a strategic approach: rapidly scan the entire exam first to gauge its scope, tackle familiar questions first to build momentum and confidence, and flag challenging questions to return to later. Knowing that a difficult problem is temporarily set aside prevents it from derailing the entire attempt. Furthermore, for multiple-choice

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questions, using the process of elimination before attempting to select an answer significantly reduces cognitive overload.⁴

Talk with your teacher - Make sure you understand what's going to be on each test and know how to best prepare. Also, let your teacher know that you feel anxious when you take tests. Your teacher may have suggestions to help you do well.

Learn relaxation techniques - To help you stay calm and confident right before and during the test, do relaxation techniques. These include deep breathing, tensing then relaxing your muscles one at a time, or closing your eyes and imagining a positive outcome. Practice these methods daily so they feel like a habit when test day comes.

Get plenty of sleep - Sleep is directly related to getting good grades in school. Preteens and teenagers especially need to get regular, solid sleep. But adults need a good night's sleep, too, to do their best work.

Don't ignore other problems - Test anxiety may get better by getting help for any condition that interferes with the ability to learn, focus or concentrate — for example, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia or a learning disability. In many cases, a student diagnosed with these conditions is entitled to certain types of help with test taking, such as extra time to complete a test, testing in a less distracting room or having questions read aloud.⁵

See a professional counsellor - if needed. Talk therapy, also called psychotherapy, with a psychologist or other mental health professional can help you work through feelings, thoughts and behaviors that cause or worsen anxiety. They can also teach you study and test-taking skills and how to stay organized to help you do your best. Ask if your school has counseling services or ask if your employer offers counseling through an employee assistance program.

the Above discustion we say that To reduce exam anxiety, learn effective study methods, stick to a routine, and review the whole exam before answering questions. Talk to your teacher about your worries, practice relaxation techniques, ensure good sleep, and seek help if you have any underlying issues. Consider professional counseling for additional support.

Conclusion

Managing exam anxiety isn't about getting rid of all stress, which can be impossible and sometimes counterproductive. To do this effectively, students should use a mix of thorough preparation, mental techniques to change negative thoughts, and physical regulation. By staying organized and mastering their material, students can lower the chances of feeling anxious. When anxiety does happen, they can use mental tools to counter negative self-talk and quick physical actions like deep breathing as breaks from stress. Regularly using these strategies helps students face exams with calmness, allowing their knowledge to guide their performance instead of their anxiety.

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