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PSYCHO-SOCIAL AND INDIVIDUAL DETERMINANTS OF ANXIETY IN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

***Abstract.** The article presents an experimental research of psycho-social and individual factors which cause anxiety in children and adolescents. In our research participated 792 children and adolescents. As results we established that family composition and negative family atmosphere full of emotional imbalances, disapproval, tension, conflicts and hostility among family members determines the anxiety in children and adolescents. Also we underlined that personality components and the way of interrelation among colleagues and peers can cause anxiety.*

***Keywords:** anxiety, children, adolescents, psycho-social factors, individual factors*

Anxiety is one of the most common mental health problems all over the world. Anxiety starts in the childhood and is present during the whole life. At children and adolescents, the anxiety manifests itself differently compared to adults [1, 2, 3]. Anxiety is one of the emotional problems most frequently encountered at children and adolescents, representing also the main cause for which children and their families request help within mental health services [2, 3].

Among all the negative feelings of a child and of an adolescent, the anxiety has a special place, often getting to behaviour inhibition, to the own resources impairment, to the decrease of learning capacity, of activity productivity, to difficulties in communication and social functioning [4]. Moreover, one can often underline other problems of emotional and behavioural health at children and adolescents with anxiety: attention deficit disorders, hyperactivity, depression, etc.

Following the above mentioned, we ascertain the problem of anxiety in childhood and adolescence *in the context of new social realities* insufficiently

investigated, for this reason we set out to study psycho-social and individual determinants of anxiety in children and adolescents [5].

The research target group included **792 children** among which: *152 preschoolers, 170 junior schoolchildren, 320 preadolescents and 150 adolescents* [5].

For the investigations we have chosen a series of tests, inventory and questionnaires for the more authentic examination and appreciation of anxiety and its psycho-social and individual factors at children and adolescents: *R. Temml, V. Amen and M. Dorca anxiety test for children, Scale of anxiety manifestation at children, Taylor's scale of anxiety manifestation, Family drawing test, The „Ladder” technique B. Шур, Дембо-Рубинштейн self-appreciation study of preadolescents technique (A. Прихожан variant), Self-confidence study test (B. Ромек)) CPQ Questionnaire for children and Cattell 16PF Questionnaire Form C* [5, 6].

In the intention to conceptualize anxiety in children and adolescents we have administered the *R. Temml, V. Amen and M. Dorca anxiety test for children, Scale of anxiety manifestation at children and Taylor's scale of anxiety manifestation*. The results obtained for the anxiety levels at preschoolers, junior schoolchildren, preadolescents and adolescents are illustrated in table 1 [5].

Table 1

Frequencies by anxiety levels in children and adolescents

Age	Anxiety levels		
	low	moderate	high
Preschoolers	0%	53,95%	46,05%
Junior schoolchildren	15,30%	40,58%	44,12%
Preadolescents	15,31%	53,13%	31,56%
Adolescents	2%	66,67%	31,33%

46,05% from the investigated preschoolers, 48,08% from junior schoolchildren, 31,56% from preadolescents and 31,33% from adolescents obtained high scores for anxiety.

Preschoolers' anxiety was integratively approached through emphasizing psycho-social factors (family composition, family climate (favorable family

situation, anxiety within the family, conflicts within the family, inferiority feeling and hostility in the family)), as well as individual ones (self-appreciation) which condition it. Initially we would present the anxiety levels at preschoolers from different types of families from the point of view of composition (complete family, temporarily disintegrated family and one-parent family).

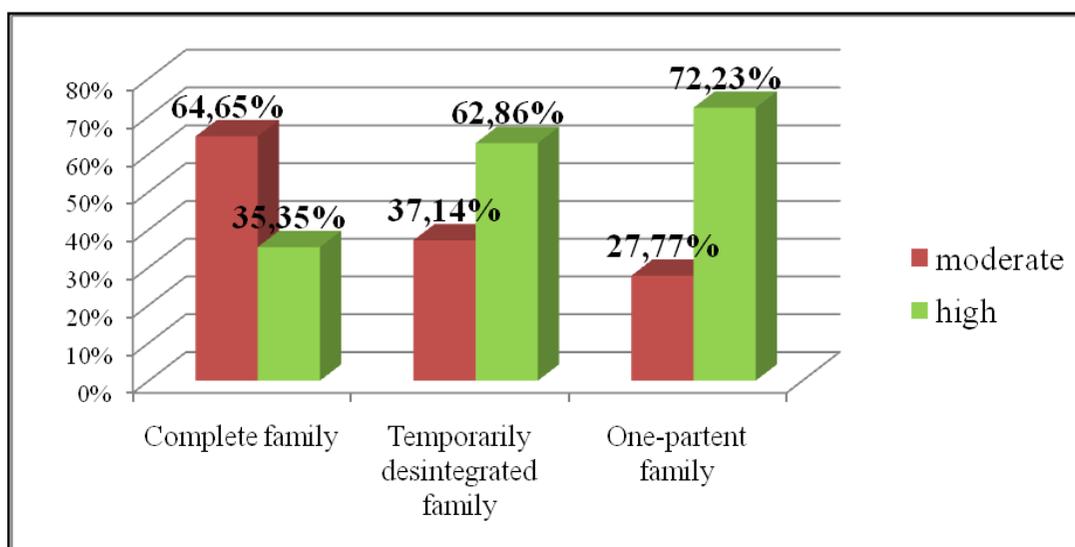


Fig. 1. Frequencies by levels for anxiety in preschoolers from different types of families

The preschoolers from temporarily disintegrated families (62,86%, $\chi^2=8,0024$, $p\leq 0,01$) and one-parent families (72,23%, $\chi^2=8,5569$, $p\leq 0,01$) prove a higher level of anxiety. The modifications in family composition so frequent and spectacular during the last years affect and change the way and practices of growing and educating children on several dimensions the preschoolers under investigation who come from temporarily disintegrated families and one-parent families face the risk to develop different problems, among which: communication difficulties, weak relations with other children, self-distrust, aggressiveness, vulnerability, restlessness and anxiety. The preschoolers feel stronger the separation from parents and prove higher anxiety compared to junior schoolchildren, preadolescents and adolescents included in the study. Even though, temporarily disintegrated families and one-parent families are determining factors of high anxiety at preschool stage, in complete families, there was identified a great number of preschoolers with high

anxiety, which allows us to affirm that the appearance of anxiety does not always depend on the structural composition of the family.

Next to the family structure, the most important influences exercised by the family environment discern from the home atmosphere. A factor that contributes to the atmosphere within the family consists in the extent to which it is loving and supporting or deep in conflicts. The interrelations between the anxiety and family climate features (*Family drawing test*) are illustrated in table 2.

Table 2

**Study of the correlation between anxiety and family
climate according to Pearson**

Variables	Correlation coefficient	Significations threshold
Anxiety / favorable family situation	$r=-0,5722$	$p\leq 0,01$
Anxiety / conflicts within the family	$r=0,4446$	$p\leq 0,01$

Preschoolers' anxiety is conditioned by the family climate, spiritual atmosphere, interrelations established between adult family members (parent – parent), between adults and children (parents – children) and children – children, and the predominant way of communication. Not all the families can offer a balanced, warm and affective climate to the preschooler. The contemporary family is characterized by a conglomerate of problems and situations which are often detrimental to the fragile soul of the child and which can condition preschooler's anxiety. Moreover, the enumerated features of family climate, necessarily contribute to the appearance of anxieties, restlessness and concerns at preschoolers: the fear of parents / parents punishment, the fear of being scold by parents (especially by the mother), the fear of beatings, hitting and pinching, fear and restlessness of arguments between parents, restlessness when parents are restless (especially mother), the fear of standing at corner and the fear of father's belt.

The development of the anxiety in preschoolers can be explained through modifications in personality components, namely, self-esteem. A very high self-esteem prevails at the preschoolers with high level of anxiety (50%, *The „Ladder”*

technique B. Illyp.) Very high self-esteem is influenced by low level of development of reflexing and permanent social comparison with other children. From the way of how the preschoolers describe themselves, one can conclude that they always have the tendencies to appreciate themselves in order to be like the rest of the children. The permanent relating to other children can potentiate the anxiety increase during the preschool period.

Holistic approach to anxiety in junior schoolchildren was centered on the identification of defining factors of this. Initially we investigated the psycho-social factors (family structure and features of family climate) which favour the presence of anxiety. The anxiety level at junior schoolchildren from complete families, from temporarily disintegrated families and from one-parent families are illustrated as follows.

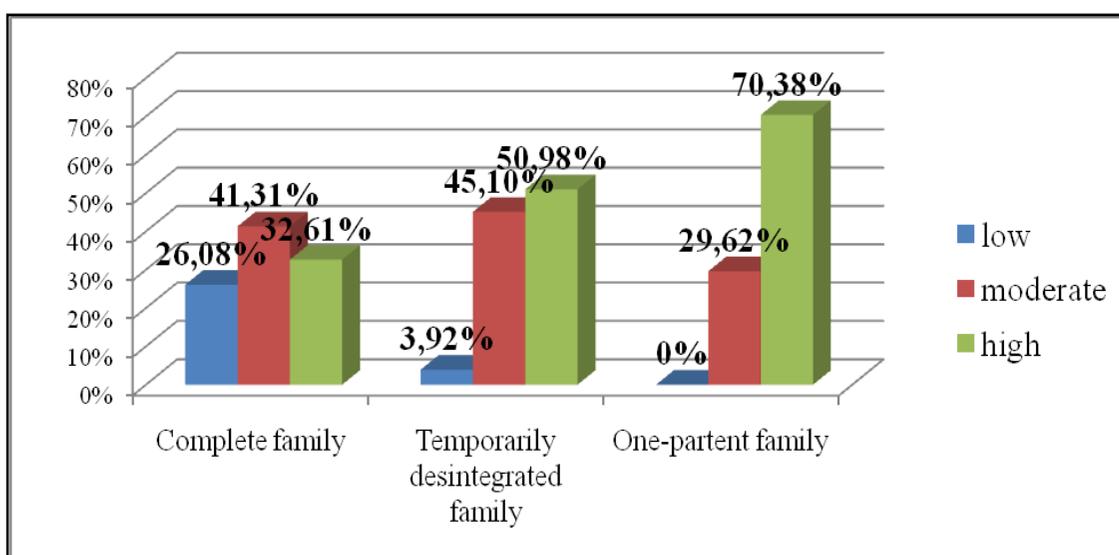


Fig. 2. Frequencies by levels for anxiety in junior schoolchildren from different types of families

Junior schoolchildren from one-parent families (70,38%, $\chi^2=9,3692$, $p\leq 0,01$ și $\chi^2=2,7193$, $p\leq 0,10$) have higher anxiety compared to junior schoolchildren from temporarily disintegrated families (50,98%) and to those from complete families (32,61%). For junior schoolchildren we emphasize upon the same tendency as for preschoolers: the temporarily disintegrated family as well as one-parent family triggers the development of anxiety in junior schoolchildren.

Besides the family structure, for junior schoolchildren, we investigated the features of family climate as well. The associations between anxiety and family climate features (*Family drawing test*) are emphasized in table 3.

Table 3

**The study of correlation between anxiety and family climate features
according to Pearson**

Variables	Correlations coefficient	Significances threshold
Anxiety / favorable family situation	$r=-0,676$	$p\leq 0,01$
Anxiety / anxiety within the family	$r=0,4921$	$p\leq 0,01$
Anxiety / conflicts within the family	$r=0,6466$	$p\leq 0,01$
Anxiety / sense of inferiority	$r=0,5607$	$p\leq 0,01$
Anxiety / hostility within the family	$r=0,6618$	$p\leq 0,01$

Junior schoolchildren anxiety is determined by the family climate, the atmosphere and the interrelations between parents, between parents and children, between children and by the existent communication style. A factor that contributes to the harmonious development of the child is the family atmosphere full of warmth, encouragement, sensibility, and affection towards the child. Many junior schoolchildren live within families with a climate impregnated with hostility, opposition, insecurity, rejection, lack of implication and conflicts, which can condition the risk of developing behavioral problems as well as internalizing anxiety, fear, upset, aggression and low self-esteem. The unfavorable features of the family climate create conditions for the development at junior schoolchildren of: fear of punishment, fear of beating, fear of being scold by parents, fear of hearing the parents arguing / quarrelling and fear of being criticized by parents.

The development of the anxiety in junior schoolchildren is conditioned by the self-esteem as a fundamental component of the personality. For 7 year-old juniors the same interrelation between anxiety and self-esteem is kept as at preschool stage. 7 year-old schoolchildren with high level of anxiety present very high level of self-esteem (29,34%, $r=0,3426$, $p\leq 0,01$, *The „Ladder” technique B. Illyp*). As a whole, junior schoolchildren have more conscientious, more realistic and more balanced

judgments and self-appreciations. Juniors' self-appreciation / self-esteem is based on school results and on daily confrontations and comparisons with peers. The very high self-appreciation of the investigated children can be explained by the lack of the assessment and grading of the learning activity with grades in the primary school, and its realization through the attribution of ratings. Therefore, not all the juniors are conscious of their own value in comparison to their peers which can condition feelings of inferiority, restlessness and anxiety.

The integrated approach to anxiety is possible through the prism of the study of modifications in personality traits. In order to study and outline the evidence of personality traits at junior schoolchildren we administered the *CPQ Questionnaire for children*. The averages for personality traits at junior schoolchildren with different anxiety levels are illustrated in figure 3.

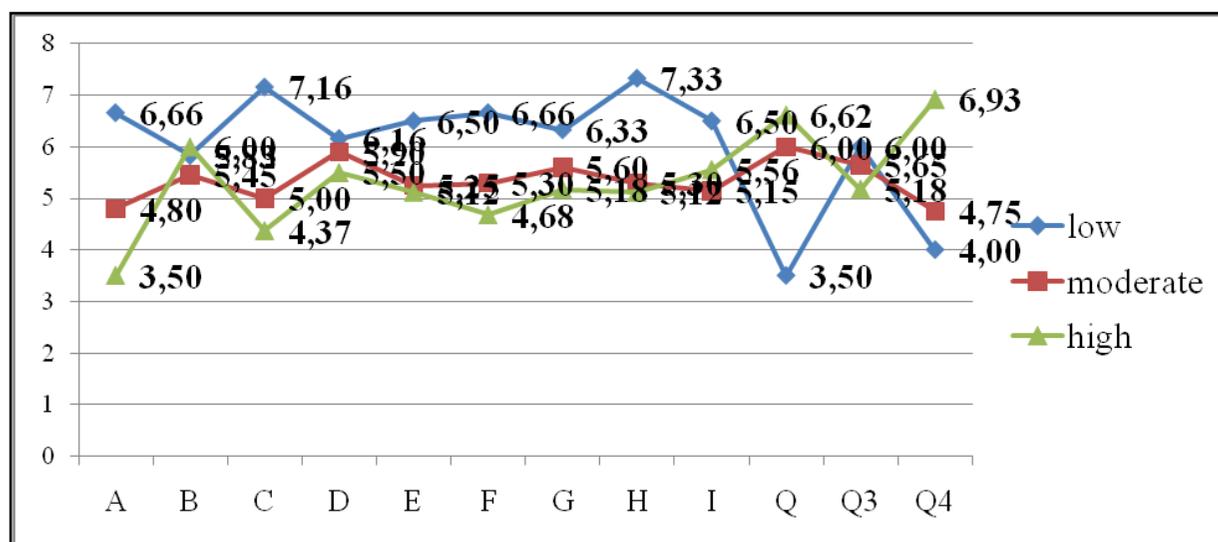


Fig. 3. Averages for personality traits in junior schoolchildren with different anxiety levels

The presence of the anxiety in junior schoolchildren is associated with personality factors: the A factor: *schizothymia* – *cyclothymia* ($r=-0,5024$, $p\leq 0,01$), C factor: *emotional instability* – *stability* ($r=-0,3934$, $p\leq 0,01$), F factor: *expansivity* – *nonexpansivity* ($r=-0,4856$, $p\leq 0,01$), H factor: *timidity* – *boldness* ($r=-0,5606$), Q factor: *confidence* – *tendency for culpability* ($r=0,4845$, $p\leq 0,01$) and Q4 factor: *weak ergic tension* and *high ergic tension* ($r=0,6797$, $p\leq 0,01$).

We conceptualize the anxiety in preadolescents by investigating the psychosocial and individual factors which contribute to its development. As it follows we would highlight the levels of anxiety in preadolescents from complete, temporarily disintegrated families and from one-parent families.

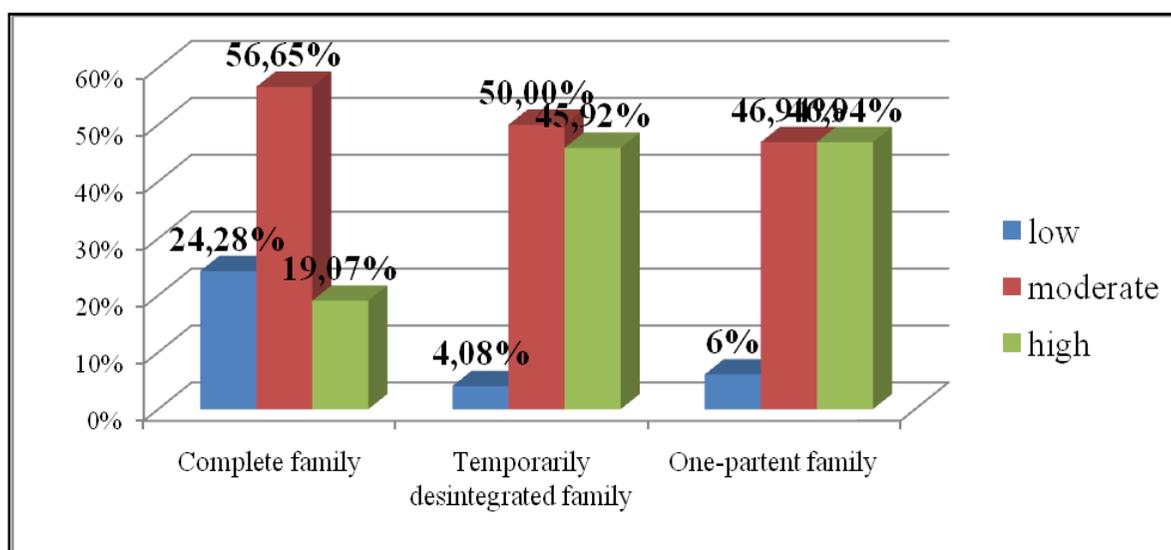


Fig. 4. Frequencies by levels for anxiety in preadolescents from different types of families

The preadolescents from temporarily disintegrated families (45,92%, $\chi^2=22,5756$, $p \leq 01$) and preadolescents from one-parent families (46,94%, $\chi^2=15,7172$, $p \leq 01$) are more anxious than the preadolescents from complete families. As we found out with regard to preschool stage and junior school stage, the temporarily disintegrated family and the one-parent family have important influences on the development of the anxiety in preadolescents.

The study of the family included the identification of family climate features which can influence the presence of the anxiety in preadolescents. The implications and the nature of the interaction between the family climate features (*Family drawing test*) and anxiety are illustrated in table 4.

As well as smaller children, the preadolescents are sensitive to the psychological atmosphere from the family. A social situation of unfavorable and disadvantaged development impregnated with lack of love, with antipathy, hostility, objection, reciprocal spouses' distrust, with affective and spiritual relations marked

by negative emotions, with instability, by an atmosphere of fear, with tension, worry, strain, insecurity and stress determine the establishment of anxiety in preadolescence.

Table 4

**Study of the correlation between anxiety and family
climate features according to Pearson**

Variables	Correlations coefficient	Significances threshold
Anxiety / favorable family situation	$r=-0,3829$	$p\leq 0,01$
Anxiety / anxiety within family	$r=0,4928$	$p\leq 0,01$
Anxiety / conflicts within the family	$r=0,3865$	$p\leq 0,01$
Anxiety / sense of inferiority	$r=0,6025$	$p\leq 0,01$
Anxiety / hostility in the family	$r=0,4865$	$p\leq 0,01$

Besides the family context, in preadolescence, other sources of anxiety are related with the changes in the content of self-awareness (low self-appreciation – 40%, $r=0,3038$, $p\leq 0,01$, *Дембо-Рубинштейн self-appreciation study of preadolescents technique (A. Прихожан variant)*, low self-confidence – 50%, $r=0,3241$, $p\leq 0,01$, *Self-confidence study test (B. Ромек)*) and communication experience of the preadolescence with peers and with the reference group (low social contacts initiation, 58,93%, $r=-0,4385$, $p\leq 0,01$). The production of profound changes in terms of the development of central elements – shapes the psychological portrait of the preadolescent. The perception and evaluation of own capacities, aptitudes, physical and character traits, emotions, feelings, thoughts and judgments allow the initiation of self-image formation. In preadolescence, the self-appreciation and self-confidence lack precision are fragmentary, unstable, and very often negative. Such features of self-appreciation and self-confidence have an impact upon the emotional state of the preadolescent generating dissatisfaction, aggressiveness, fears and anxiety. Preadolescent's rejection and disapproval, distant, reserved and unfriendly interrelation with the peers, the limitation or lack of communication within the group of students lead to closure, retreat and loneliness of the preadolescent. Preadolescent's isolation perpetuates the feelings of sensitivity, unrest, susceptibility, distrust, insecurity, vivid anxiety.

The anxiety interrelations with personality traits complete the explicative laws and mechanisms of the anxiety in adolescents. The results obtained for personality traits (*Cattel 16PF Questionnaire Form C*) at preadolescents with different anxiety levels are presented in figure 5.

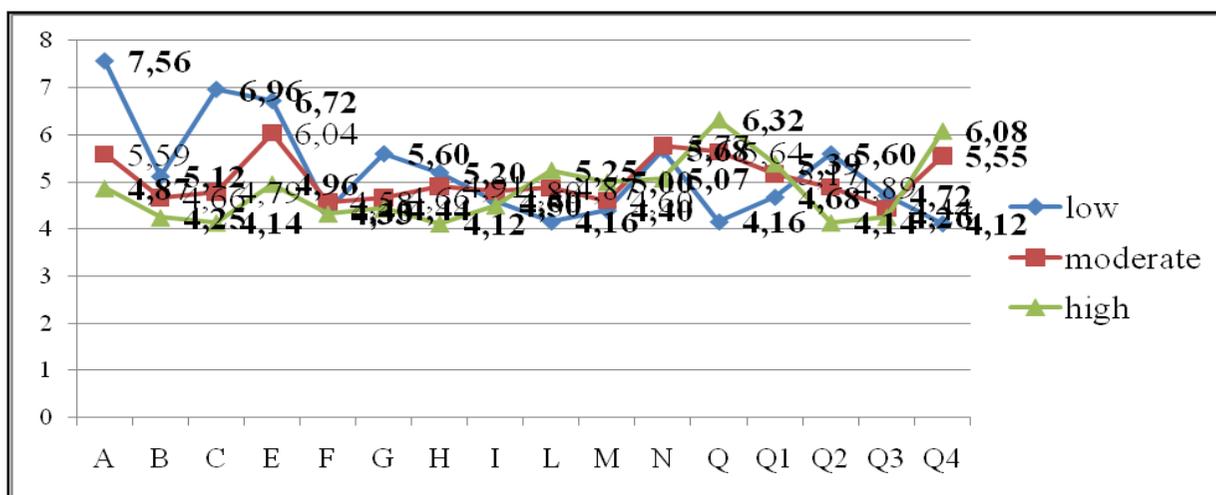


Fig. 5. Averages for personality traits at preadolescents with different anxiety levels

The personality traits characteristic to preadolescents with high anxiety are: A factor: *schizothymia* – *cyclothymia* ($r=-0,597$, $p\leq 0,01$), C factor: *emotional instability* – *emotional stability* ($r=-0,6416$, $p\leq 0,01$), E factor: *obedience* – *dominance* ($r=-0,6652$, $p\leq 0,01$), G factor: *low superego* – *superego force* ($r=-0,3927$, $p\leq 0,01$), H factor: *timidity* – *boldness* ($r=-0,4706$, $p\leq 0,01$), L factor: *trustful attitude* – *doubt* ($r=0,4216$, $p\leq 0,01$), Q factor: *trust* – *tendency to culpability* ($r=0,5628$, $p\leq 0,01$), Q2 factor: *addictive attitude* – *independence towards the group* ($r=-0,4722$, $p\leq 0,01$), and Q4 factor: *weak ergic tension* and *strong ergic tension* ($r=0,3763$, $p\leq 0,01$).

Anxiety development in adolescents is associated with the following influence factors (psycho-social and individual). The three intensity levels of anxiety for the adolescents from different types of the families depending on composition are illustrated in figure 6.

High anxiety manifested in adolescence is conditioned by the type of the family from which the adolescent comes: the temporarily disintegrated family (37,50%,

$\chi^2=5,2548$, $p\leq 0,05$) and one-parent family (66,67%, $\chi^2=21,0117$, $p\leq 0,05$). As well as in previous development stages we would mention that the temporarily disintegrated family and one-parent family have implications in the establishment of the anxiety in adolescence.

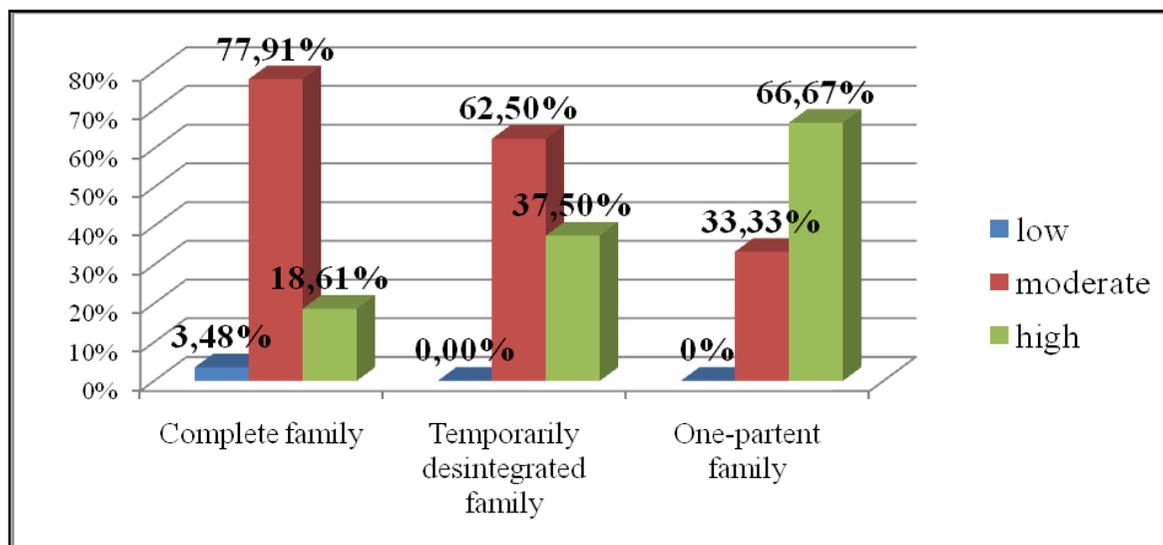


Fig. 6. Frequencies by levels for anxiety in adolescents from different types of families

The explanatory framework of the anxiety in adolescents is reflected in the emphasis of the interrelations between anxiety and family climate features (*Family drawing test*).

Table 5

Study of the correlation between the anxiety and family climate features according to Pearson

Variables	Correlations coefficient	Significances threshold
Anxiety / favorable family situation	$r=-0,5242$	$p\leq 0,01$
Anxiety / anxiety within the family	$r=0,4697$	$p\leq 0,01$
Anxiety / conflicts within the family	$r=0,6581$	$p\leq 0,01$
Anxiety / sense of inferiority	$r=0,3118$	$p\leq 0,01$
Anxiety / hostility in the family	$r=0,6718$	$p\leq 0,01$

The central element in anxiety problems in adolescents is each separate family climate as concrete development situation. The adolescents that come from a family

where the climate is full of lack of affectivity, emotional instability, anxiety, depression, negativity, lack of support, unpredictability, humiliation, criticism, threatening, hostility will show anxiety.

The multy-aspect approach to anxiety determination in adolescence included as well the investigation of individual factors referring to key-components of adolescents' personality which continue to crystallize and define at this age stage. Adolesences anxiety is connected self-confidence (low level: 31,91%, $r=-0,3922$, *The self confidence study test (B. Ромек)* and social courage (low level: 65,96%). The self-confidence in adolescents is strongly influenced by the body image, as well as, by the development and definition of own identity. The discontent with body image and the failure in acquiring a steady, comfortable and durable identity have as a result the diffusion of the role or a sense of confusion concerning what and who the adolescent is, which is also reflected in self-doubt. All these can cause disorientation, despair and strong anxiety. The circumstances connected with the delineation of adolescents' identity can undermine their courage and consequently determine the presence of anxiety.

An important direction in our approach of anxiety grounding was the investigation of association between anxiety and personality traits of the adolescents. Adolescents' personality traits were investigated through the administration of *Cattel 16PF Questionnaire (Form C)*. The obtained results are presented in figure 7.

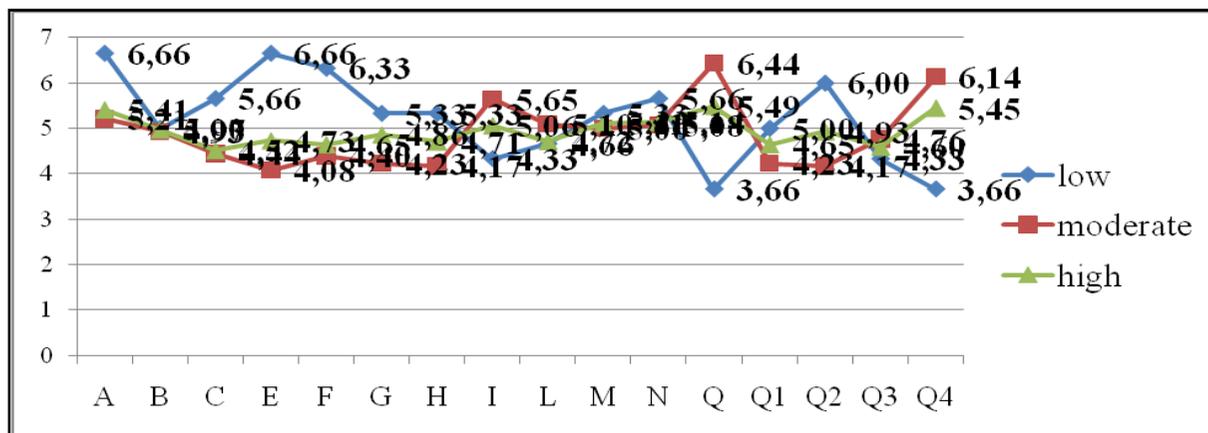


Fig. 7. Averages for personality traits in adolescents with different levels of anxiety

Adolescents' high anxiety is interrelated with the following personality factors: E factor: *obedience* – dominance ($r=-0,5188$, $p\leq 0,01$), G factor: *weak superego* – superego force ($r=-0,333$), H factor: timidity – boldness ($r=-0,3648$, $p\leq 0,01$), I factor: rationality – *affection* ($r=0,3817$, $p\leq 0,01$), Q factor: trust – *tendency for culpability* ($r=0,4599$, $p\leq 0,01$), Q2 factor: *addiction attitude* – independence towards the group ($r=-0,4731$, $p\leq 0,01$) and Q4 factor: weak ergic tension and *high ergic tension* ($r=0,4756$, $p\leq 0,01$).

In conclusion for the present research we can mention the following: the multi-aspect approach of the psycho-social and individual factors responsible for anxiety highlights that the presence of anxiety is explained by the new social realities: the conditions and modifications from the temporarily disintegrated family and one-parent family, and by social situation of development: family climate, the existent spiritual atmosphere between the adults from the family, between adults and children, between children. An unfavorable family atmosphere, which lacks love and affection and where antipathy, unacceptance, doubt, misunderstandings, negative emotions, tension, worries and stress are dominant, causes anxiety. We also experimentally proved the influence of the personality components at the establishment of the anxiety. The very high self-appreciation of preschoolers and junior schoolchildren which supposes low level of reflexion development and permanent social comparison with other children condition anxiety. The fragmentary self-appreciation and self-confidence, usually negative, at preadolescents and adolescents can favor worry and anxiety. A reserved, distant and unfriendly interrelation with colleagues and peers, in preadolescence and adolescence determine an emphasized anxiety. We substantiated that the anxiety is a multidimensional response to the psycho-social conditions and/or to the individual psychological dimensions. The bigger the number of the factors that act upon the child and adolescent, the higher is the possibility of anxiety appearance.

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