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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CHILDREN’S FEARS

***Abstract.** The article describes a comparative study of anxiety in children. The research target included 230 preschoolers and junior schoolchildren. Through applying The unfinished sentences test (A. И. Захаров) and Ollendick phobias’ scale we investigated the anxieties, restlessness, concerns and fears. As results we established that for preschooler’s anxieties, restlessness, and concerns is caused by their immediate reality or by their own imagination meanwhile junior schoolchildren develop fears about a bigger world beyond their close environment.*

***Keywords:** anxiety, restlessness, concerns, fears, preschoolers, junior schoolchildren*

Anxiety is considered a normal and often healthy human emotion. When a human being experience disproportionate levels of anxiety, it might become a clinical disorder [1, 2, 3, 4].

Anxiety is frequently encountered at children and adolescents andd knows a particular development depending on age, gender and changes in psycho-social and individual factors, and is accompanied by configurations in personality traits [4, 5].

Anxiety in children manifests itself in situational dimension and has the shape of distinct restlessness, concerns and fears [4, 5].

Following the above mentioned we realized a comparative study of children’s anxieties, restlessness, concerns, and fears.

The research target group included **230 children** of different ages among which: **152 preschoolers** with ages between 4 and 7 years old, **78 junior schoolchildren** with ages between 9 and 11 years old [4, 5].

For the investigations we have chosen a series of tests and inventory for the more authentic examination and appreciation of anxieties, restlessness, concerns and

fears at children: *The unfinished sentences test (A. И. Заваров)* and *Ollendick phobias' scale for children* [5].

We ground anxiety in preschoolers through the prism of its manifestation, namely the situational one being caused by new and changeable circumstances and events. The situational anxiety at preschool stage takes the shape of some distinct restlessness and concerns. The examination of restlessness and concerns at schoolchildren was realized through **The unfinished sentences test (A. И. Заваров)**. The anxieties, restlessness and concerns for the whole target group as well as the evolution of these, depending on gender and age are presented in table 1 [5].

Table 1

Preschoolers' anxieties, restlessness and concerns

Anxiety, restlessness and fear	Frequency						
	Total	Gender		Age			
		Boys	Girls	4 years old	5 years old	6 years old	7 years old
Fear of horror scenes from movies	78,31	70,51	86,48	70,27	70,90	86,27	77,77
Fear of darkness (fear of night)	75,65	76,92	74,32	81,08	67,27	80,39	77,77
Fear of remaining alone (fear of loneliness)	46,71	42,30	51,35	35,13	43,63	60,78	33,33
Fear of parents / parents' punishment	42,76	52,56	32,43	37,83	47,27	45,09	66,66
Fear of animals	38,81	37,17	40,54	35,13	45,45	39,21	11,11
Fear of being scolded by parents (especially by mother)	36,18	32,05	40,54	32,43	49,09	27,45	22,22
Fear of beating, hitting and pinching	34,21	34,61	33,78	29,72	34,54	37,25	33,33
Fear and restlessness of arguments between parents	26,97	21,79	32,43	18,91	16,36	41,17	44,44
Fear of harsh sounds, noise, crying and shouting	22,36	24,25	20,27	32,43	20	19,60	11,11
Fear of nightmares and bad dreams	9,21	10,25	8,10	5,40	12,72	8,80	0
Fear of monsters	8,55	5,12	12,16	13,51	5,45	7,84	11,11
Fear of the bad, malice, bad people, bad children	7,23	8,97	5,40	0	10,90	7,84	11,11

Table continuation 1

Anxiety of separation (especially from the mother)	6,57	7,69	5,40	2,70	9,09	7,84	0
Fear of doctors, pain, injections, medicine	6,57	7,69	5,40	5,40	7,06	5,88	11,11
Fear of standing at corner	5,92	6,41	5,40	18,91	3,53	0	0
Fear of kindergarten, of the educator	5,92	8,97	2,70	8,01	5,45	3,92	11,11
Restlessness and fear of not being played with	3,28	2,56	4,05	0	3,53	1,96	22,22
Fear of ghosts	3,28	6,41	0	5,40	5,45	0	0
Fear of responding within kindergarten activities	2,63	3,84	1,35	2,70	1,81	3,92	0
Restlessness when parents are restless (especially mother)	2,63	1,28	4,05	0	0	5,88	11,11
Fear of tempests, snow, wind, fire	2,63	3,84	1,35	0	3,53	1,96	11,11
Fear of sadness	1,97	2,56	1,35	0	0	5,88	0
Fear of cold	1,97	1,28	2,70	2,70	1,81	1,96	0
Fear of height	1,31	2,56	0	0	0	1,96	11,11
Fear of tunnels	1,31	2,56	0	0	0	3,92	0
Fear of father's belt	0,65	1,28	0	0	1,81	0	0
Fear of the excavator	0,65	1,28	0	0	1,81	0	0
Fear of police	0,65	1,28	0	0	1,81	0	0
Fear of robots	0,65	1,28	0	2,70	0	0	0

The preschool period is marked by certain anxieties, restlessness and specific concerns. Children between 4 and 7 years old face the following anxieties, restlessness and concerns: fear of horror scenes from movies (78,31%), fear of darkness (fear of night) (75,65%), fear of remaining alone (fear of loneliness) (46,71%), fear of parents / parents' punishment (42,46%), fear of animals (38,81%), fear of being scolded by parents (especially by mother) (36,18%) and fear of beatings, hitting and pinching (34,21%). Preschoolers boys and girls differ in what refers to manifested anxieties, restlessness and concerns. Prevalent at boys are the fear of darkness (fear of night) (76,92%), fear of parents / parents' punishment (52,56%, $\chi^2=6,2878$, $p\leq 0,05$), fear of beating, hitting and pinching (34,71%) and fear of harsh sounds, noise, crying and shouting (24,25%), while the girls feel the fear of horror scenes from movies (86,48%, $\chi^2=6,7394$, $p\leq 0,01$), fear of remaining alone (fear of loneliness) (51,35%), fear of animals, fear of being scolded by parents

(especially by mother) (40,54%) and fear and restlessness of arguments between parents (32,43%). The distinct character of anxieties, restlessness and concerns at preschool stage is explained by the fact that boys and girls show behaviors full of intense feelings and emotional discharges, of exploration of adults' world reality differently. The anxieties, restlessness and concerns which children show correspond with their age. The 4 year-olds feel most intensely the fear of darkness (fear of night) (81,08%), fear of harsh sounds, noise, crying and shouting (32,43%), and fear of standing at corner (18,91%, $\chi^2=5,8336$, $p\leq 0,05$). The 5 year-olds are mostly afraid of being scolded by parents (especially by mother) (49,09%, $\chi^2=5,2246$, $p\leq 0,05$), fear of parents / parents' punishment (47,27%), fear of animals (45,45%) and fear of nightmares and bad dreams (12,72%). The 6 year-old preschoolers frequently present the fear of horror scenes from movies (86,27%, $\chi^2=3,4241$, $p\leq 0,10$), fear of remaining alone (fear of loneliness) (60,78%, $\chi^2=5,628$, $p\leq 0,05$), fear and restlessness of arguments between parents (41,17%, $\chi^2=4,8967$, $p\leq 0,05$, $\chi^2=8,0289$, $p\leq 0,01$) and fear of beatings, hitting and pinching (37,25%). With the new changes, leaps and acquisitions in thinking, behaviors and personality of the preschooler we also identify modifications in children's anxieties, restlessness and concerns.

In order to complete the conception of anxiety in junior schoolchildren with new knowledge, we investigated the phobias typical to the age which come to outline the presence of the situational anxiety. The frequency for phobias (**Ollendick phobias' scale for children**) at junior schoolchildren are presented in table 2 [5].

Table 2

Junior schoolchildren fears

Fears	Frequencies					
	Total	Boys	Girls	9 year-old	10 year-old	11 year-old
Death or dead people	75,64	76,92	74,35	76,35	73,52	62,50
Fire, the phobia to be burnt	66,66	66,66	66,66	66,66	61,76	62,50
To be stricken by a car or lorry	60,25	35,89	84,61	52,94	67,64	75
To be contaminated with a severe disease	55,12	58,97	51,28	43,58	58,82	62,50
To fall from great height	50	28,20	46,15	46,15	44,11	75
To hear the parents arguing	50	43,58	56,41	51,28	44,11	50

Table continuation 2

To suffocate	48,71	38,46	58,97	48,71	47,05	37,50
A thief entering the house	47,43	33,33	61,53	38,46	44,11	87,50
To be cut or injured	46,15	38,46	53,84	35,89	50	62,50
To have low results at school	43,58	43,58	43,58	33,33	44,11	75
Nightmares	39,74	33,33	46,15	48,71	26,47	37,50
To be electrocuted	39,74	35,89	43,58	41,02	32,35	50
To get lost in an unknown place	37,17	35,89	38,46	25,64	38,23	75
Guns	35,89	41,02	30,76	46,15	11,76	75
Bears and wolves	35,89	20,51	51,28	25,64	41,17	50
Air attacks	34,61	28,20	41,02	30,76	41,17	12,50
Lizards and snakes	32,30	17,94	66,66	35,29	47,05	62,50
Spiders	30,76	28,20	30,76	38,46	20,58	25
Rats and mice	29,48	10,25	51,28	30,76	26,47	25
To have your hair cut	28,20	10,25	46,15	20,51	38,23	12,50
To be criticized by parents	28,20	20,51	35,89	35,89	17,64	25
To be punished	26,92	20,51	33,33	41,02	8,82	25
Unknown dogs or those with aggressive appearance	26,92	23,07	30,76	10,25	44,11	25
To be sent to the principal's office	24,35	10,25	33,33	17,94	20,58	37,50
To be obliged to wear someone else's clothes	21,79	38,46	10,25	17,94	23,52	50
Deep water and sea	21,79	15,38	28,20	28,20	14,70	12,50
To dance in front of an audience	20,51	10,25	28,20	25,64	11,76	25
To seem crazy	19,23	20,51	17,94	15,38	20,58	25
Cemeteries	19,23	5,12	33,33	25,64	11,76	12,50
Bizarre people	19,23	10,25	28,20	20,51	11,76	37,50
Worms and snails	17,94	2,56	33,33	17,94	17,64	12,50
Bats and birds	16,66	7,69	25,64	20,51	8,82	25
To take an exam	15,38	15,38	15,38	15,38	14,70	12,50
To be car-sick	14,10	7,69	20,51	10,25	14,70	25
Not to pass an exam	14,10	7,69	20,51	7,69	17,64	25
To make mistakes	14,10	10,25	17,94	12,82	14,70	12,50
To be stung by a bee	12,82	12,82	12,82	10,25	11,76	25
To see blood	12,82	2,56	23,07	15,38	8,82	12,50
To be interrogated without being announced by the teacher	12,82	20,51	5,12	15,38	5,88	25
Sharp objects	12,82	2,56	23,07	20,51	0	25
To go to a doctor or to a dentist	11,53	2,56	20,51	7,69	11,76	25
Close spaces	11,53	12,82	10,25	10,25	11,76	12,50
Dark rooms	11,53	7,69	15,38	10,25	11,76	12,50
Injections	10,25	5,12	15,38	10,25	5,88	25
Buzzers noise	8,97	7,69	10,25	10,25	2,94	25
Ants and scarabs	6,41	0	12,82	5,12	5,88	12,50
To be kept at school	6,41	5,12	7,69	7,69	5,88	0
To be scolded / downcast	5,12	7,69	2,56	7,69	2,94	0

Table continuation 2

To be ill at school	5,12	2,56	7,69	5,12	5,88	0
To be in a crowd	5,12	2,56	7,69	7,69	0	12,50
To be involved in a bustle	3,84	5,12	2,56	0	0	37,50
To eat something that you do not like	3,84	5,12	2,56	5,12	2,94	0
To be obliged to go to school	2,56	2,56	2,56	0	5,88	0
Earthquake	2,56	0	5,12	0	2,94	12,50
To do something new	1,28	0	2,56	2,56	0	0
Tempests / storms	1,28	0	2,56	2,56	0	0
To go to hospital	1,28	0	2,56	0	0	12,50
Phantoms and ghosts	1,28	0	2,56	0	2,94	0

As they get older, the children between 9 and 11 years old do not find themselves in anxieties, restlessness and concerns particular for preschoolers and junior schoolchildren of 7 and 8 years old. Only fears are kept: to hear the parents arguing (50%), of nightmares (39,74%), of animals (35,89%, 29,48%, 26,92%), to be punished (26,92%), to go to the doctor or to the dentist and of dark rooms (11,53%), of tempests / storms and of phantoms and ghosts (1,28%). The junior pupils develop fears about the greater world, beyond their immediate environment. At this age, children show fears of death or the dead (75,64%), fire, the phobia of being burnt (66,66%), to be stuck by a car or of a lorry (60,25%), to get contaminated with a severe disease (55,12%), to get suffocated (48,71%), to be cut or injured (46,15%), to be electrocuted (39,74%), to get lost in an unknown place (37,17%), etc. The essence of the phenomenon of anxiety in junior schoolchildren would be more exhaustive only by its approach and through the prism of new fears emphasized during this stage of development. The school framework and learning lead to the appearance of new fears: low results at school (43,58%), being sent to the principal's office (24,35%), to take an exam (15,38%), not to pass an exam (14,10%), to be interrogated without being announced by the teacher (12,82%), to be kept at school (6,41%), to be obliged to go to school (2,56%). We would consider the listed concerns as component elements of SA. As they get older we ascertain the same legitimacy as with junior schoolchildren of 7 and 8 years old, the girls present more fears. Boys' fears can be conceptualized in connection with the threat of physical integrity and school situations. With all the above mentioned, girls' fears

appear in relation to parents and / or can be caused by imagination and own thoughts without having a real ground. In the case of boys, the following fears can be outlined: the fear of death or the dead (76,92%), the fear of fire, or the phobia of being burnt (66,66%), the fear of being contaminated with a severe disease (58,97%) and the fear of having low results at school (43,58%), while among girls there are configured more fears, among which we can underline: the fear of being stricken by a car or lorry (84,61%, $\chi^2=19,326$, $p\leq 0,05$), the fear of fire or the phobia to be burnt and the fear of lizards and snakes (66,66%, $\chi^2=18,9616$, $p\leq 0,05$), the fear that a burglar is entering your house (61,53%, $\chi^2=6,2215$, $p\leq 0,05$), the fear of getting suffocated (58,97%), the fear of hearing your parents arguing / quarreling (56,41%), the fear of being cut or injured (53,84%), the fear of bears and wolves (51,28%, $\chi^2=8,0229$, $p\leq 0,05$) and the fear of spiders (30,76%, $\chi^2=15,4074$, $p\leq 0,01$).

In conclusion we can mention that anxiety at preschoolers and junior schoolchildren is determined by new events, situations and circumstances and shows up through worries, concerns and distinct fears. In preschoolers anxiety comes from events and personal experience, from the immediate reality and the imaginary which is in full development, in junior schoolchildren anxiety appears in everyday situations older children develop fears about a bigger world beyond their close environment.

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