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Comparative Psychology of Rural & Urban School boys: Self-Esteem, Anxiety across Different Academic Standards

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Abstract: *This study investigated key psychological variables—self-esteem and anxiety levels—among rural and urban high school boys across different academic standards (Grades 8, 9, and 10). A total of 210 apparently healthy male students (105 rural, 105 urban) were purposively selected from high schools in Tumkur District, Karnataka, India. Self-esteem was assessed using the Brief Self-Esteem Inventory, and anxiety levels using Sinha's Comprehensive Anxiety Test. Data were collected during the 2014-15 academic year under ethical guidelines and informed consent, then analyzed using One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to examine differences across academic standards. The ANOVA results indicated a significant overall difference in both Anxiety ($F(2,207)=4.41, p=0.013$) and Self-Esteem ($F(2,207)=6.08, p=0.003$) across academic standards. Post hoc analysis for Anxiety revealed a significant decrease from 9th to 10th standard ($p < 0.05$), with no well-being across academic progression. These results emphasize the crucial need for targeted psychosocial support within educational frameworks to foster positive mental health outcomes during this critical significant differences observed between 8th and 9th, or 8th and 10th standards. For Self-Esteem, significant increases were identified from 9th to 10th standard ($p < 0.05$) and from 8th to 10th standard ($p < 0.05$), with no significant change between 8th and 9th standards. These findings highlight dynamic shifts in adolescent psychological developmental period in diverse Indian contexts.*

Keywords: *Adolescent Psychology, Self-Esteem, Anxiety, Educational Stages, Rural-Urban Context, India.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence represents a critical and transformative epoch in human development, characterized by profound shifts across psychological, social, and cognitive domains (Farkaš, 2024). During this dynamic phase, individuals embark on a complex journey of identity formation, actively constructing a sense of self, values, and beliefs that will guide their adult lives. Simultaneously, they navigate increasingly intricate and evolving social landscapes, learning to form and maintain peer relationships, understand social hierarchies, and integrate into broader community structures. This period also brings with it a substantial increase in academic demands, as educational curricula become more challenging and the stakes for future career and higher education pathways begin to crystallize (Stoica, Bota, & Cazan, 2025). Within these formative and often challenging years, two key psychological constructs self-esteem and anxiety emerge as paramount. They are not merely transient emotions but critical determinants that profoundly influence an individual's overall well-being, their adaptive capabilities in the face of stress, and ultimately, their trajectory towards future success (Klein, 2019; Tang & Zhu, 2024).Therefore, acquiring a deep understanding of how these vital psychological variables manifest and evolve across diverse educational stages and within varied socio-geographical contexts is not just academically valuable, but absolutely essential for the design and implementation of effective and empathetic psychological support systems tailored to meet the unique needs of adolescents (Lea, Taylor, & Gibson, 2022).

Self-esteem, a cornerstone of robust mental health, embodies an individual's subjective evaluation of their own value and capabilities (Plysang, 2025). A strong sense of self-worth consistently correlates with enhanced psychological resilience, leading to better academic engagement and the cultivation of healthier social relationships. Conversely, a diminished self-esteem acts as a significant risk factor for a spectrum of mental health challenges, prominently including heightened anxiety and symptoms of

depression (Niveditha, Srikanth, & Kulkarni, 2024; Teli et al., 2023). Parallel to this, anxiety especially within an academic context is a prevalent emotional reaction to stressors. While a moderate level of anxiety can sometimes serve as a motivator, driving individuals to perform, chronic or excessive anxiety poses serious threats (Anjum, Hossain, Hasan, Uddin, & Sikder, 2022). It can severely impair cognitive function, disrupt concentration, and profoundly undermine both academic performance and an individual's overall quality of life (Prabha, Devi, Rao, & Kanakabushanam, 2017).

The diverse socio-cultural landscape of India, with its stark contrasts between rural and urban environments, offers a unique lens through which to examine these psychological variables (Kapur, Misra, & Verma, 2022). Urban areas, for instance, are frequently characterized by highly competitive educational systems, a wide array of opportunities, and significant exposure to modern lifestyles and global influences. These characteristics can introduce distinct psychological stressors, but also offer different types of resources, when compared to rural settings (Imam, 2022). Rural areas, typically marked by strong community bonds, traditional values, and potentially limited access to resources, might foster distinct psychological profiles. These environmental disparities could differentially shape the psychological well-being of adolescent boys (Legas & Gu, 2025).

Moreover, progressing through different academic standards (such as the 8th, 9th, and 10th grades in high school) marks distinct developmental phases for students. Each of these stages brings with it unique academic demands and evolving social expectations. These transitions are highly likely to influence a student's levels of self-esteem and anxiety (Simanungkalit, 2024). For example, in India, the 10th standard is particularly crucial as it culminates in high-stakes board examinations. This period is typically associated with heightened pressure and an intense academic focus, making it a significant point of psychological impact.

Despite the acknowledged critical importance of these psychological variables during adolescence, comprehensive comparative studies that simultaneously examine self-esteem and anxiety among rural and urban school boys across specific academic standards within the Indian context remain notably underexored. This gap is particularly evident in regions like Tumkur District, Karnataka. Therefore, this study directly aims to fill this void by assessing and comparing these psychological variables in a purposively selected sample of rural and urban high school boys from Tumkur District, Karnataka, specifically across Standards VIII, IX, and X. The empirical evidence generated from these findings is expected to be vital for developing targeted psychological interventions and educational policies that are tailored to the specific needs of adolescents in India's diverse and complex educational landscape.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Design

This investigation employed a cross-sectional comparative research design to analyze the selected psychological variables across different groups.

2.2. Study Population and Sampling

The study participants comprised 210 adolescent males enrolled in high schools within Tumkur District, Karnataka. The sample was purposively selected and divided into two independent groups: 105 boys attending rural schools and 105 boys attending urban schools. Within each of these groups, participants were evenly distributed across Standards VIII, IX, and X, ensuring representation of different age cohorts (approximately 13-17 years). All selected students were confirmed to be apparently healthy and without any pre-existing medical or psychological conditions that could confound the results. Data collection took place during the academic year 2014-15 within the respective school premises. Ethical approval was obtained from relevant institutional review boards, and comprehensive informed consent was secured from the parents or legal guardians of all participants. Additionally, verbal assent was obtained from each student prior to their participation, ensuring their voluntary involvement.

2.3. Instrumentation

Two standardized and validated self-report questionnaires were used to measure the psychological variables:

1. **Brief Self-Esteem Inventory:** This instrument was utilized to gauge participants' global self-esteem. It provides a quantitative measure of an individual's overall sense of self-worth and capabilities. Higher scores are indicative of higher self-esteem (Hills, Francis, & Jennings, 2011).

2. **Sinha's Comprehensive Anxiety Test:** This standardized psychological test was administered to quantify participants' anxiety levels. The test yields a numerical score, where higher scores correspond to higher levels of reported anxiety (Verma, 2018).

All assessments were conducted following the standardized administration guidelines for each instrument. Where necessary, the questionnaires were translated into the local language to ensure clarity and cultural appropriateness, and these translations were back-translated to verify conceptual equivalence.

2.4. Statistical Procedures

Data collected were meticulously analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science, Version 16.5). Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were computed for all psychological variables across the rural and urban groups, and for each academic standard. To assess significant differences in self-esteem and anxiety across academic standards (VIII, IX, and X), One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed. Upon observing a significant overall F-ratio ($p < 0.05$) from the ANOVA, Scheffe's Post Hoc test was subsequently applied to identify precise pairwise mean differences between the academic standards. Scheffe's test was chosen for its conservative nature, which helps control for Type I errors when conducting multiple comparisons (Tishukaj et al., 2017).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Overview of Psychological Variables

The analysis focused on understanding the variance in Anxiety and Self-Esteem among high school boys across different academic standards, combining rural and urban participants for this specific set of analyses as per the provided data tables.

3.2. Anxiety Levels across Academic Standards

Anxiety levels, measured by Sinha's Comprehensive Anxiety Test, were analyzed across the 8th, 9th, and 10th academic standards. Table 1 presents the results of the One-Way ANOVA.

Table 1. . *Analysis of Variance for Anxiety among Rural and Urban High School Boys Studying in Different Standards*

Groups	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F Value	Level of Significance	P Value
Between Groups	1494.752	2	747.376	4.41	Significant at 0.05	0.013
Within Groups	35065.843	207	169.400			
Total	36560.595	209				

Table-1 indicates that the One-Way ANOVA for Anxiety across different academic standards yielded a statistically significant F-value of 4.41 ($F(2,207)=4.41, p=0.013$). This F-value exceeds the critical table value of 3.04 at the 0.05 level of significance, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Thus, there is a significant difference in Anxiety levels among high school boys when compared across the 8th, 9th, and 10th standards.

To pinpoint these specific differences, Scheffe's Post Hoc test was conducted, and its results are detailed in Table-1(a).

Table 1(a). *Post Hoc Test for the Mean Difference in relation to Anxiety among Rural and Urban High School Boys Studying in Different Standards*

Group Variables	8th Standard	9th Standard	10th Standard	Mean Difference	Critical Difference
Anxiety	34.157	38.257	-	4.100	5.425
	-	38.257	31.800	6.457*	
	34.157	-	31.800	2.357	

*Significant at 0.05 level

Table-1(a) reveals a statistically significant difference in anxiety at the 0.05 level solely between the 9th standard and 10th standard (mean difference = 6.457). This difference is greater than the critical

difference of 5.425. In contrast, the mean difference between 8th standard and9th standard (4.100) and between 8th standard and 10th standard (2.357) were both less than the critical difference of 5.425, indicating no significant differences in these comparisons. This pattern suggests a noteworthy reduction in anxiety levels as students transition from the 9th to the 10th standard. The mean scores for each standard are visually presented in Fig.1.

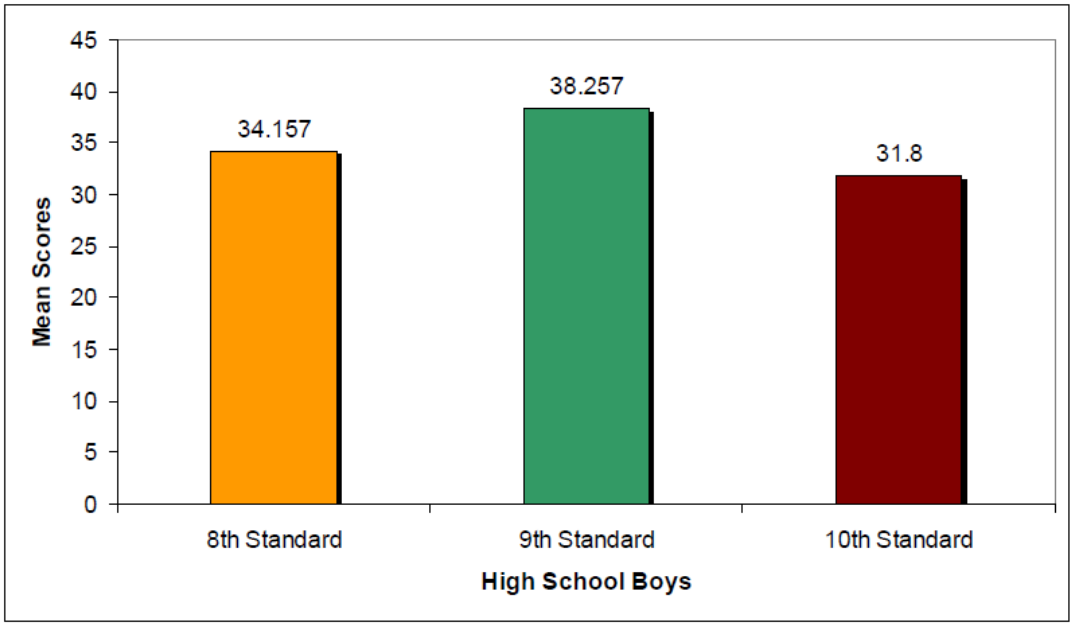

Fig 1. *Mean differences of the Anxiety among rural and urban high school boys studying in 8th, 9th and 10th standard*

3.3. Self Esteem Across Academic Standards

Self-esteem, assessed using the Brief Self-Esteem Inventory, was also examined across the 8th, 9th, and 10th academic standards. Table-2 displays the results of the One-Way ANOVA.

Table 2. *Analysis of Variance for Self Esteem among Rural and Urban High School Boys Studying in Different Standards.*

Groups	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F Value	Level of Significance	P Value
Between Groups	505.400	2	252.700	6.08	Significant at 0.01	0.003
Within Groups	8605.857	207	41.574			
Total	9111.257	209				

Table-2 demonstrates that the One-Way ANOVA for Self Esteem across academic standards yielded a statistically significant F-value of 6.08 (F(2,207)=6.08,p=0.003). This F-value is greater than the critical table value of 4.71 at the 0.01 level of significance, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Consequently, a significant difference in Self Esteem levels exists among high school boys when compared across the 8th, 9th, and 10th standards.

To explore these specific differences, Scheffe's Post Hoc test was applied, and its results are presented in Table-2(a).

Table 2(a). *Post Hoc Test for the Mean Difference in relation to Self Esteem among Rural and Urban High School Boys Studying in Different Standards.*

Group Variables	8^{th} Standard	9^{th} Standard	10^{th} Standard	Mean Difference	Critical Difference
Anxiety	60.528	61.071	-	0.543	2.688
	-	61.071	64.057	2.986*	
	60.528	-	64.057	3.529*	

*Significant at 0.05 level

From Table-2(a) it is observed that there is a significant difference at the 0.05 level on Self Esteem among rural and urban high school boys in two specific comparisons:

1. Between the 9th standard and 10th standard (mean difference = 2.986), which is greater than the critical difference of 2.688.
2. Between the 8th standard and 10th standard (mean difference = 3.529), which is also greater than the critical difference of 2.688.

However, the mean difference of 0.543 between 8th standard and 9th standard is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level, as this obtained mean difference is less than the critical difference value of 2.688. This pattern indicates that self-esteem significantly increases as students progress from 9th to 10th standard, and also from 8th to 10th standard, while no significant change is observed between 8th and 9th standards. The graphical presentation of the same has been depicted in Fig.2.

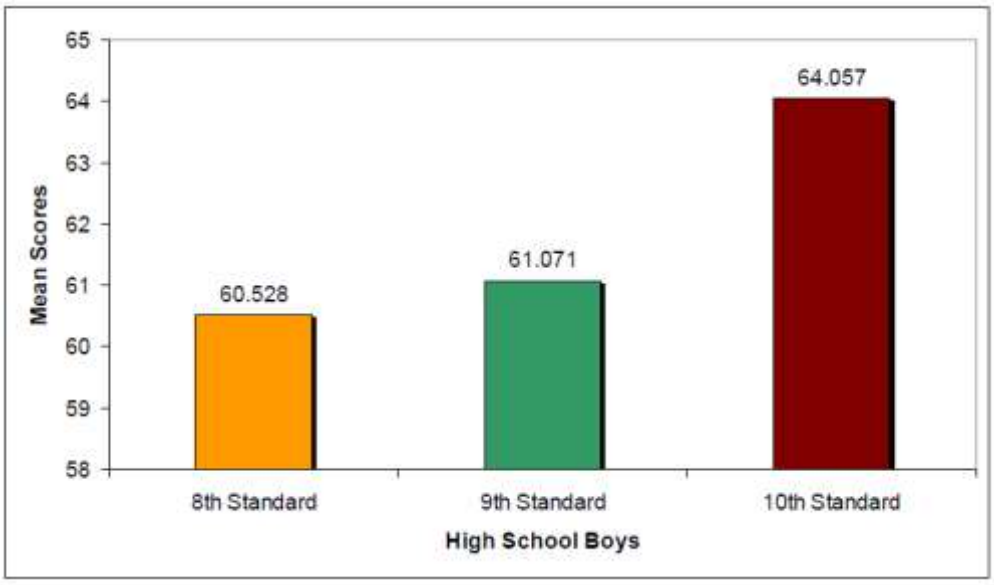

Fig 2. *Mean differences of the Self Esteem among rural and urban high school boys studying in 8th, 9th and 10th standard.*

4. Overall Discussion on Psychological Variables

This study offers valuable insights into the developmental patterns of anxiety and self-esteem among adolescent schoolboys in Tumkur District, Karnataka, as they progress through different academic standards. While the overarching study design included rural-urban comparisons, the provided data specifically highlights the nuanced shifts in these psychological variables across grades, combining both rural and urban participants for these analyses.

The most compelling finding regarding Anxiety is the significant decrease observed from the 9th to the 10th standard. This outcome challenges the common assumption that anxiety continuously escalates with increasing academic pressure, especially in a high-stakes 10th standard board year in India. Several factors may contribute to this unexpected, yet positive, trend. By the 10th standard, students may have developed more refined coping mechanisms, improved time management skills, and a more realistic appraisal of academic demands after navigating the complexities of the 9th standard (Peixoto, Niemivirta, & Pipa, 2025). The intensive and structured preparation for board exams, including focused revision and targeted guidance from teachers, might reduce uncertainty and foster a sense of control, thereby alleviating anxiety (Masoodi & Kales, 2025; Samanta, Mukherjee, Ghosh, & Dasgupta, 2012). Furthermore, a strong sense of shared experience and collective preparation among peers in the 10th standard could create a supportive environment that mitigates individual stress. The lack of significant difference in anxiety between the 8th and 9th standards suggests that the initial transition into high school might not immediately trigger a significant increase in anxiety within this combined group, or that existing support systems are adequate for this initial adjustment.

In contrast, Self-Esteem demonstrated a clear and statistically significant increase as students advanced through high school, particularly from 9th to 10th standard, and overall from 8th to 10th standard. This

upward trajectory aligns with developmental theories positing a more stable and positive self-concept in later adolescence (de Moor, Nelemans, Becht, Meeus, & Branje, 2023; Reddy, Kannekanti, & Hamza, 2015). As adolescents mature, they consolidate their identities, achieve greater academic competence, and experience more autonomy, all of which contribute to a heightened sense of self-worth. The successful navigation of academic challenges, especially the demanding 10th standard, can significantly bolster self-efficacy and, consequently, self-esteem (Balakrishnan & Abraham, 2021; Kumar & Randhawa, 2022). The peer environment in these later years, often characterized by mutual support and shared goals, can also play a crucial role in validating and enhancing self-perceptions. The absence of a significant change in self-esteem between the 8th and 9th standards might suggest a period of initial adjustment where self-evaluations remain relatively stable before a noticeable positive shift occurs in the subsequent year (Bouffard, Vezeau, Roy, & Lengelé, 2011).

While the provided results primarily focused on academic stage comparisons, the study's design implies an underlying interest in rural-urban differences. It is important to acknowledge that while the observed developmental patterns in anxiety and self-esteem across grades appear to transcend immediate rural-urban distinctions in these aggregated analyses, these environmental contexts likely exert a differential influence on baseline psychological well-being and the specific resources available for coping. Urban students might face higher academic competition, while rural students might contend with more limited educational resources or different societal expectation (Hossain et al., 2024; Singh, 2017). A deeper exploration of these rural-urban nuances through specific comparative analyses (e.g., t-tests) would further enrich the understanding of adolescent psychological development in India.

The findings carry significant implications for educational policy and psychological interventions in Indian schools. The unexpected decrease in anxiety and the notable increase in self-esteem in the lead-up to the 10th standard board exams are positive signs, suggesting that students are either adapting well or benefiting from specific preparations. This indicates that resources could be strategically allocated to support students during earlier, potentially more vulnerable, transitions (e.g., introduction to high school, or the complexities of 9th standard). Fostering environments that promote a healthy self-concept, recognizing diverse forms of achievement, and equipping students with effective coping mechanisms are paramount (Fayoza, 2024). Understanding what contributes to the positive shifts observed in the 10th standard could inform proactive measures to instill similar resilience and self-worth in younger students.

5. LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. Its cross-sectional design, conducted in 2014-15, inherently limits the ability to establish causal relationships or to track individual developmental trajectories of psychological variables over time; a longitudinal approach would offer a more dynamic perspective. The purposive sampling method, while practical for the study's scope, may restrict the generalizability of the findings beyond the specific context of Tumkur District and to the broader Indian adolescent population. The study exclusively focused on male students, precluding generalizability to female adolescents, who may experience distinct psychological developmental patterns. Furthermore, while the study mentioned rural-urban comparisons in its design, explicit results for these comparisons regarding self-esteem and anxiety were not detailed in the provided data, limiting the depth of discussion on location-specific influences. The specific details of the "Brief Self-Esteem Inventory" and "Sinha's Comprehensive Anxiety Test" were not fully elaborated (e.g., number of items, specific subscales if any), which could affect replicability. Finally, the study did not delve into granular socioeconomic factors, family dynamics, or specific school-level differences (e.g., teacher-student ratios, availability of counseling) within rural and urban settings, which could provide richer explanations for observed psychological patterns. Future research should address these limitations by adopting longitudinal designs, including diverse demographic groups, providing comprehensive data for all variables, and exploring a wider range of contextual and individual factors.

6. CONCLUSION

This comparative study has illuminated critical developmental shifts in anxiety and self-esteem among high school boys across academic standards (8th, 9th, and 10th) in Tumkur District, Karnataka. The significant decrease in anxiety levels observed from 9th to 10th standard is a notable finding, suggesting that students may develop effective coping strategies or benefit from specific structured preparation as they approach the culmination of high school. Concurrently, a significant increase in self-esteem was

evident as students progressed to the 10th standard, indicating a positive trajectory in self-perception during later adolescence.These findings underscore the dynamic and adaptive nature of adolescent psychological well-being. They suggest that while academic pressures exist, students are capable of developing resilience and a stronger sense of self. The study's results are invaluable for informing educational and psychological interventions in Indian schools. Tailored support systems that capitalize on the factors contributing to reduced anxiety and enhanced self-esteem in later high school years could be implemented, potentially focusing on fostering these positive psychological traits earlier in a student's academic journey. Further research, particularly longitudinal studies that delve deeper into rural-urban disparities and the interplay of various socio-cultural factors, is crucial for developing holistic and contextually sensitive mental health and educational programs for Indian adolescents.

6.1. Future scope

Building on the present findings and limitations, future research should embrace more dynamic and comprehensive approaches.

Longitudinal Studies: Track individual adolescents over time to understand the developmental trajectories of self-esteem and anxiety, establishing how these variables change with academic progression.

Detailed Rural-Urban Comparisons: Conduct explicit and thorough analyses comparing rural and urban boys to pinpoint the specific influences of their distinct environments on psychological well-being.

Gender Inclusion: Expand studies to include female adolescents for a more complete understanding of psychological development across genders in India.

Diverse Methodologies: Move beyond sole reliance on self-report by incorporating observational data, peer/teacher ratings, or qualitative methods to gain richer, less biased insights into self-esteem and anxiety.

Contextual Factors: Investigate how specific factors like socioeconomic status, family dynamics, school environment, and digital influence mediate or moderate psychological outcomes.

Intervention Development: Identify protective factors in later academic years (like 10th standard) and use these insights to develop and evaluate targeted psychosocial interventions for students in earlier, potentially more vulnerable, stages.

Regional Replication: Replicate studies in diverse Indian regions to assess the generalizability of findings and identify unique regional variations.

These future directions will provide a more comprehensive, timely, and actionable understanding of adolescent mental health, informing better support systems in Indian education.

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