

Does Gender Matter? The Difference of Stress in Adolescents

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Abstract: Adolescence, as a turning point in the human life, denotes the process of maturation and reaching adulthood. Based on the empirical findings presented above, the objective of this study is to investigate whether gender serves as a determinant in these pressures and their associations. Two questionnaires are used in the work, one is the ASQ (Adolescent Stress Questionnaire) and one is the DASS-21 (Depression Anxiety Stress Scale). The data used in study were obtained from a sample of more than 120 students in 10 classrooms (3 schools), aged between 12 and 18 years. The data obtained through investigation and research shows that adolescent stress levels are not significantly reflected in gender differences, and there is a significant correlation between ASQ and DASS. The effects of the relationship between the gender difference are still unclear, and so further research must be conducted.

Keywords: gender difference, adolescent, stress, depression, anxiety

1. Introduction

Adolescence, as a turning point in the human life, denotes the process of maturation and reaching adulthood [1]. The responses of adolescents to stressful life events frequently differ from those of adults when faced with comparable life situations and transitions [2]. In the past several decades, researches on the stress in adolescents have played an important role in promoting teenager's mental health and reducing the number of tragedies including alcoholism, suicide and drug abuse, etc.

According to research, worrying, ruminating, and stressful life experiences all contribute to the emergence of anxiety and depression symptoms [3]. Depression was shown to be substantially more common in women than in men. Meanwhile, it was discovered that DAS and students' academic achievement had an opposite relationship. The amount of negative experiences in the student's life was found to be substantially correlated with depression and stress [4]. With increasing numbers of research dedicated to stress, the factors contributing to stress are becoming increasingly intricate. This section will primarily discuss previous research conducted on academic, family, and social stress.

Studies have shown that teenagers all throughout the world typically worry about school-related concerns. In comparison to Western countries, Asian societies (such as Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore) experience greater academic pressure. Evidence points to a sizable disparity between the academic stress experienced by male and female students. The findings showed that academic stress

among female students caused by other expectations was shown to be predicted by school-related worries. In addition, compared to males, girls greatly outperformed them on the Academic Expectations Stress Inventory [5]. It can be inferred that male students in Senior Secondary school experienced comparatively lower levels of academic stress compared to their peers [6]. However, a separate study revealed no statistically significant disparity in emotional intelligence or academic stress between male and female adolescents aged 15 to 19 [7][8].

According to empirical studies, conflict, characterized by frequent and intense verbal disagreements that are rarely resolved in a mutually satisfying manner, has been predominantly classified as parent-adolescent stress [9]. Different types of family stress include life event stress (such as the death of a loved one), marital discord, family relocation, and financial stress [10]. Family stress can cause problems such as reduced sleep quality, depression, suicide and alcohol abuse. The Family Stress Model suggests that the developmental outcomes of children and adolescents are influenced by families' economic difficulties through a sequence of intermediate family mechanisms. [11]. In the context of family stress, girls who are exposed to their mother's problems or exhibit a strong interpersonal caring orientation experience heightened levels of depressed mood. This suggests that in situations characterized by family stress, which detrimentally affects the mental health of both boys and girls, having a strong caring orientation or being involved in family problems is particularly detrimental to girls [12]. Other findings indicate that parental depressed mood explains more variance in parental behavior toward boys than girls. The trend in the previous findings suggests that boys may indeed be more adversely influenced by parents' stressful events than are girls [13]. Most of the research has focused on Western families and on girls. Given the unique set of cultural values and socialization practices observed in Asian, this article will examine whether the effects of family stress on different gender differ in Chinese families.

Researchers predicted that independent and dependent stress, particularly in the interpersonal context, would be associated with depressive symptoms in girls but not in boys [14]. Findings from cross-sectional analyses using multiple-regression techniques reveal girls' higher levels of interpersonal caring orientation and involvement in the problems of others significant account for approximately 25% of the gender difference in distress [15]. Even when boys and girls share similar profiles of exposure to stress, girls may be more vulnerable to the mental health effects of these experiences. For example, some formulations emphasize cognitive vulnerability such as learned helplessness that may act in conjunction with stressful life circumstances, and others hinge on social relational processes which are expected to make girls and women more vulnerable to the effects of stresses and transitions that are social in nature social support, and interpersonal orientation and involvement variables, boys reported exposure to more recent personal stressors, but in all other areas, girls reported more stress [15]. Rephrased: In comparison to males, females reported higher levels of social physique anxiety, experienced more pressure and encouragement from peers to alter their physical appearance, engaged in more discussions related to body image, and felt a stronger sense of identification with their peer group [16]. When tested during adolescence, chronic social stress had the effect of reducing anxiety and/or increasing risk-taking behavior specifically among females [17]. That is, the strength of the moderation of friend support on the relationship between perceived stress and depression was stronger in the girls than in the boys. When girls have sufficient friend support, their perceived stress will impose less harmful effects on their positive affect; but when they lack friend support, their perceived stress will contribute more to their depressive symptoms. For boys, perceived stress and depression are closely related to each other regardless of their perceived levels of friend support [18]. The findings in this regard provide support for the hypothesis that during adolescence, females tend to report higher levels of stress compared to males. This includes experiencing more stress in their relationships with both peers and family members. [19].

The previous studies have certain limitations, such as some studies not having a 1:1 ratio of male to female participants in their selection, some studies having small sample sizes, and some research results showing unclear differences investigating the influence of parental conduct on children's levels of anxiety. Chinese adolescents experience more intense episodes of academic stress during their teenage years in comparison to their Western peers [20]. Given the evolving landscape of social cognition and talent standards, Chinese adolescents are confronted not only with immense academic pressure stemming from a large population base but also encounter prevalent social and familial pressures. Based on the empirical findings presented above, the objective of this study is to investigate whether gender serves as a determinant in these pressures and their associations. To facilitate a better comprehension of stress and promote mental well-being, the study aims at provide assistance to adolescents and their guardians in enhancing their understanding of stressors and implementing effective coping strategies.

2. Methodology

2.1. Sample and procedure

This study was mainly used to explore the behavioral differences of adolescents due to gender. Two questionnaires are used, one is the ASQ(Adolescent Stress Questionnaire)and one is the DASS-21(Depression Anxiety Stress Scale). The data used in study were obtained from a sample of more than 120 students in 10 classrooms (3 schools), aged between 12 and 18 years. All data processed the process of informed consent and student personal permission. Students obtained a standardized introduction to the survey informing them of the purpose of the survey and the questionnaire had guidelines guiding them on how to fill out correctly. All students who volunteered were in the anonymous questionnaire and took an average of 15 minutes. The content of the questionnaire will include questions of tripartite stress from family, society, and participants can represent the degree with the numbers 1-5.

2.2. Measures

The ASQ selected comprises 27 questions that capture various dimensions of stress [21]. Additionally, the DASS-21 is utilized as a shortened version of the DASS-42 [22]. The DASS-21 is a self-report scale specifically designed to assess depression, anxiety, and stress levels. By considering age and gender, these two assessment tools effectively gauge stress and anxiety among adolescents. Previous studies have demonstrated that the scales of the DASS-21 exhibit strong internal consistency and possess high discriminative, concurrent, and convergent validity [22]. Furthermore, the ASQ-S has shown good internal reliability ($\alpha > 0.7$), while validity coefficients ranging from 0.3 to 0.4 are considered indicative of 'good' validity [23].

All validated data will be included in the analysis. Considering the ethical concerns, the form of an anonymous questionnaire was taken to ensure the students' privacy. Alternatively, the parents of each participant signed an informed consent form and were provided with a brief description of the study and reassurance of anonymity and were aware that there was no psychological risk associated with participation there. An experimenter was present during all questionnaires filling periods to address any questions or concerns generated. After the data collection, the study variables were first screened to verify compliance with the statistical data. A t-test and a test of validity and correlation will be used. No study variable had more than 5% of the cases missing [24], which was deemed not problematic.

3. Results

Reviewing the objective of study, gender differences in stress levels among adolescents will be shown in the data analysis. After referring to the professional questionnaire, the data of the total sample size of 132 were obtained from school students in different cities in north and south China and a small number of overseas students through the online questionnaire survey.

Table 1: Frequency Table.

sex				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid male	41	31.1	31.1	31.1
female	91	68.9	68.9	100.0
Total	132	100.0	100.0	
age				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 12	1	8	.8	.8
13	5	3.8	3.8	4.5
14	9	6.8	6.8	11.4
15	20	15.2	15.2	26.5
16	24	18.2	18.2	44.7
17	31	23.5	23.5	68.2
18	42	31.8	31.8	100.0
Total	132	100.0	100.0	

In order to simplify the calculation through the Table 1 frequency table, the gender and age data collected were organized into equal intervals, and the count of observed values in each interval was determined using the election voting approach. However, there were 91 women and 41 men, which resulted in no obvious gender difference.

Table 2 below illustrates a correlation between ASQ and DASS. There was a positive correlation between ASQ and DASS-21, $r(132) = .569$, $p = .00 < .05$.

Table 2: Correlations.

ASQ		DASS
ASQ Pearson Correlation	1	.569**
Sig. (2-tai led)		.000
N	132	132
DASS Pearson Correlation	.569**	1
Si g. (2-tai led)	.000	
N	132	132

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3: Correlations.

ASQ Anxiety		
ASQ	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.523**
N		132
Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
N		132

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

CORRELATIONS

/VARIABLES=ASQ Depression
/PRINT=TWOTAIL NOSIG
/MISSING=PAIRWISE.

And the Table 3 also shows that ASQ and anxiety have a significant correlation, $r(132) = .523$, $p = .00 < .05$.

Table 4: Group Statistics.

T-Test					
sex			Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
ASQ	male	41	69.56	20.151	3.147
	female	91	69.19	19.978	2.094
Stress	male	41	13.24	3.967	.620
	female	91	13.92	4.505	.472
Anxiety	male	41	12.54	3.976	.621
	female	91	12.95	3.891	.408
Depression	male	41	11.90	4.170	.651
	female	91	12.46	4.498	.471
DASS	male	41	37.68	11.177	1.746
	female	91	39.33	11.798	1.237

As indicated by the Table 4, there was an absence of any noteworthy disparity in ASQ scores between male and female, $t(130) = .099$, $p = .914 > 0.05$. Additionally, there was no significant gender difference in stress, $t(130) = -.831$, $p = .222 > 0.05$.

Table 5: Independent Samples Test.

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		Independent Samples T-Test		t		Sig. (2-tailed)		Mean Difference		Std. Error Difference		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
F	Sig.	df	df	t								Lower	Upper

Table 5: (continued).

Equal variances assumed	.012			130	.92 1	.374	3.768	7.080	7.828
Equal variances not assumed		.914	.099						
Equal variances not assumed				76.5 98	.92 1	.374	3.780	7.15 4	7.902
Equal variances assumed	1.50 8	.22 2	-.831	130	.40 5	-.679	.818	2.297	.93 8
Equal variances not assumed			-.872	86.9 35	.38 6	.679	.779	2.22 8	.86 9
Equal variances assumed	.058	.80 9	-.554	130	.58 0	-.405	.737	1.866	1.049
Equal variances not assumed			-.550	75.7 14	.58 4	-.405	.743	1.588	1.071
Equal variances assumed	.046	.83 1	-.676	130	.50 0	-.559	.828	2.196	1.078
Equal variances not assumed			-.695	82.8 06	.489	.559	.804	2.15 8	1.040
Equal variances assumed	.182	.670	-.754	130	.45 2	1.647	2.184	5.967	2.674
Equal variances not assumed			-.770	81.1 55	.44 4	1.647	2.139	5.903	2.610

Based on the Table 5, it can be inferred that there is negligible evidence of any substantial impact gender difference in adolescent stress levels, and there is a significant correlation between ASQ and DASS. However, there are many limitations in the experiment, such as too few male participants, which can lead to inaccurate data results, resulting in results that do not have significant gender differences. Participants' emphasis on mental health can also be a factor leading to errors in experimental data. In subsequent sustainable development experiments, balancing the number of men and women and the overall base can enable participants to choose topics with a wider or more precise range of questions in the form of offline questionnaires.

4. Conclusion

This essay was the result of an investigation into whether the differences in adolescent stress are gender-specific. In particular, it concentrated on the degree of stress reflected in the social environment conditions of family and interpersonal relationships among adolescents of different genders in school.

In this paper, the data obtained through investigation and research shows that adolescent stress levels are not significantly reflected in gender differences, and there is a significant correlation between ASQ and DASS.

The survey encompassed four primary divisions, alongside a minimal inquiry regarding the participants and their respective programs. The respondents were requested to provide information in four main sections: (1) academic pressure, (2) family pressure, (3) interpersonal relationships, (4) financial pressure contribution:

In previous studies, some studies have shown that there is a difference in the level of stress between men and women. Through survey research, it has been observed that stress levels do not exhibit a substantial disparity between males and females, but the overall baseline shows that the study subjects are under high stress. Based on feedback from questionnaire data, it can be seen that the study subjects pay more attention to mental health than previous studies, which is related to many factors and needs further research.

The research methodology utilized in this study offered a fresh perspective on the variations in stress levels among adolescents based on gender, albeit with some limitations regarding the generalizability of the results.

But due to the large difference in the proportion of men and women in the survey, the results are not accurate. In addition, the research subjects pay more attention to mental health, which can also lead to less significant differences in experimental results. Practitioners should consider gender differences between men and women and the level of importance participants place on mental health based on these conclusions. Further research needs to be conducted for better understanding in regards to the implications of these findings, the effects of the relationship between gender differences are still unclear, and so further research must be conducted.

Acknowledgements

Qihui Zhao, Yuhan Bei and Shiran Wang contributed equally to this work and should be considered co-first authors.

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Appendix

1. Research Informed Consent

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort will be made by the researcher to preserve your kids confidentiality including the following:

- Assigning code names/numbers for participants that will be used on all research notes and documents

The researcher will not keep any information of a private. Participant data will be kept confidential except in cases where the researcher is legally obligated to report specific incidents.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about this study, or you experience adverse effects as the result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher whose contact information is provided on the first page. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or if problems arise which you do not feel you can discuss with the Primary Researcher directly.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the researcher. If

you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

Note: Please delineate the "Consent" section of the Informed Consent Form by drawing a line across the page (like this - Example). This delineation is important because the consent form grammar shifts from second person to first person, as shown in the example.

CONSENT: I have read and I understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Thank you very much for your participation!

Participant's Parents Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher's Signature _____ Date _____

2. ASQ

Adolescent stress and anxiety survey

Our survey is about the differences of stress in teenagers of different genders. Therefore, although the questionnaire is anonymous, please fill in your gender and age truthfully. We promise that all the data will only be used for statistical analysis, please rest assured to fill in. Thank you for your precious time!

1. Gender: *

☐ Male

le

☐ Female

2. Age: *

☐ 12

☐ 13

☐ 14

☐ 15

☐ 16

☐ 17

☐ 18

How stressful is the following situation on you? 1-5 indicates degree, increasing in order (1 means no, 5 is serious)

3. Arguments at home*

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☐ 5

4. Disagreement between your parents*

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☐ 5

5. Disagreement between you and your mother*

○1	○2	○3	○4	○5
6. Disagreement between you and your father *				
○1	○2	○3	○4	○5
7. Having to study things you do not understand *				
○1	○2	○3	○4	○5
8. Teachers expecting too much from you*				
○1	○2	○3	○4	○5
9. Keeping up with school work*				
○1	○2	○3	○4	○5
10. Getting up early in the morning to go to school *				
○1	○2	○3	○4	○5
11. Going to school*				
○1	○2	○3	○4	○5
12. Getting along with your boy/girl friend*				
○1	○2	○3	○4	○5
13. Breaking up with your boy/girl*				
○1	○2	○3	○4	○5
14. Making the relationship with your boy/girlfriend work*				
○1	○2	○3	○4	○5
15. Pressure to fit in with peers*				
○1	○2	○3	○4	○5
16. Being hassled for not fitting in *				
○1	○2	○3	○4	○5
17. Peers hassling you about the way you look *				
○1	○2	○3	○4	○5
18. Being judged by your friends*				
○1	○2	○3	○4	○5
19. Lack of respect from teacher*				
○1	○2	○3	○4	○5
20. Not being listened to by teachers*				
○1	○2	○3	○4	○5
21. Getting along with your teachers*				
○1	○2	○3	○4	○5
22. Concern about your future*				

○1	○2	○3	○4	○5
23. Having to make decisions about future work or education *				
○1	○2	○3	○4	○5
24. Putting pressure on yourself to meet your future goals *				
○1	○2	○3	○4	○5
25. Not getting enough time for leisure				
○1	○2	○3	○4	○5
26. Not enough time for activities outside of school hours *				
○1	○2	○3	○4	○5
27. Having too much homework*				
○1	○2	○3	○4	○5
28. Not enough money to buy the things you need *				
○1	○2	○3	○4	○5
29. Not enough money to buy the things you want *				
○1	○2	○3	○4	○5

3. DASS-21:

Please read each statement and circle a number 0, 1, 2 or 3 which indicates how much the statement applied to you over the past week. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any statement.

The rating scale is as follows:

0 Did not apply to me at all

1 Applied to me to some degree, or some of the time

2 Applied to me to a considerable degree or a good part of time

3 Applied to me very much or most of the time

1. I found it hard to wind down.
2. I was aware of dryness of my mouth.
3. I couldn't seem to experience any positive feeling at all.
4. I experienced breathing difficulty (e.g. excessively rapid breathing, breathlessness in the absence of physical exertion).
5. I found it difficult to work up the initiative to do things I tended to over-react to situations.
6. I experienced trembling (e.g. in the hands).
7. I felt that I was using a lot of nervous energy.
8. I was worried about situations in which I might panic and make a fool of myself.
9. I felt that I had nothing to look forward to I found myself getting agitated.
10. I found it difficult to relax.
11. I felt down-hearted and blue.
12. I was intolerant of anything that kept me from getting on with what I was doing.
13. I felt I was close to panic.
14. I was unable to become enthusiastic about anything.

15. I felt I wasn't worth much as a person.
16. I felt that I was rather touchy.
17. I was aware of the action of my heart in the absence of physical exertion (e.g. sense of heart rate increase, heart missing a beat).
18. I felt scared without any good reason I felt that life was meaningless.