

A STUDY OF FEARS IN THE INDIAN SETTING

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Introduction

Fear Survey Schedules (FSS) have been employed both as research instruments as well as clinical assessment techniques. (Lang and Lazovik, 1963, Wolpe and Lang, 1964, Geer, 1965, Manosovitz and Lanyon, 1965, Rubin, *et al.*, 1968, Braun and Reynolds, 1969, and Rubin, *et al.*, 1909). Wolpe, *et al.*, (1968, p. 27) point out that it is often astonishing to find out many areas of unadaptive anxiety in an individual which have eluded all other avenues of enquiry, come to light through the FSS. The FSS by Wolpe and Lang (1964) has been used quite often in clinical situations, though Bernstein and Allen (1969) claim that its clinical bias has made it least popular and utilitarian when compared with the other fear survey schedules available.

The present study sprang up as a result of the difficulties faced in a clinical set-up while using the FSS of Wolpe and Lang. This FSS consists of a list of 76 things and experiences and the subject has to go over each of these items and has to indicate on a 5 point scale whether any of the items listed cause fear or any other unpleasant feelings in him. It was noticed that when used in the Indian set up, the subjects would not mark against some items listed while in others uniformly they marked the lower scoring end. The total fear score was markedly below ($p=.05$) those reported in the studies named above. It was thus felt that fears which do develop as a process of conditioning in the natural environment of the individual are influenced by the socio-cultural setting in which the individual lives and hence the situation, experiences and things of which the Indian subjects are likely to be afraid of, can well be different from those applicable to the western subjects. It was also felt that the natural way by which an average adult Indian faces and attempts to overcome fear producing situation may also be different.

Aim

The aim of the present study was to conduct a preliminary survey of the common things, situations and experiences which create unpleasant feelings and fears among normal adult Indians and the usual way by which they attempt to overcome these

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situations. The study as a whole was the first step towards the development of a Fear Survey Schedule for use in the Indian setting.

Method

The sample consisted of 402 educated, young adults between the ages of 17 and 35 years. The average age of the group was 24.6 years and all were educated upto the matriculation level or above. It had 267 men and 135 women. 236 individuals or nearly 60 per cent of the sample was drawn from the university student population.

The tool used was an open end questionnaire wherein the subjects were asked to list any objects, situation or experience which caused them undue fear or anxiety in, the day to day life. The instructions were specific to list in the order of intensity only those experiences or situations which they considered they do undergo and wherein the fear of anxiety produced is out of proportion to the real danger involved in the situation or where they felt that they did feel or experience more fear and anxiety than most of their friends and colleagues do. Secondly, they were asked to list the avenues or methods followed by them when they are with situations creating fear in them.

Results

Table I shows the number of fears expressed by the group. 71 individuals did not regard any fear while 331 did list one or more situations. On the whole 594 objects, experiences and situations were listed. These 594 fears could be reduced to 129 categories when finer nuances of language and synonyms, overlap and minor situational changes were removed. Table 2 shows the 331 most prominent fears which could be reduced into 81 categories and were ultimately reduced to 11 operationally defined groups. The present grouping is operational and tentative and would require further refinement in later stages of the study.

Table 3 shows the methods reported by the various individuals as the ones usually followed by them when they face fear producing situations.

TABLE—1. *Showing the number of fears expressed by the group*

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Number of fears expressed	No fears	1	2	3	4	5+	Total
Number of individuals	71	188	67	50	17	9	402
Total fears reported		188	134	150	68	54	594
Reduced specific categories		81	24	18	6		129

TABLE—2. *Showing the II operationally defined groups into which the 331 most prominent fears expressed were grouped and the frequency with which the fears in these two groups were reported by the 2 sexes*

Main Group	Sub Group	Reported Frequency (Male)%	Reported Frequency (Females)%	Rank Males	Rank Females
SELF	Qualities* (10.47) (6.66)				
frequency	Actions* (6.73) (7.40)	26.93	22.20	1	1
	Target* (6.92) (8.14)				
SOCIAL	Interact- ion* (2.99) (2.96)				
	Situation* (4.11) (2.96)	14.21	8.88	2	3
	Authority* (7.10) (2.96)				
	Aggression	7.85	1.48	3	9.5
	Animal	7.11	9.62	4	2
	Failure	6.73	1.48	5.5	9.3
	Academic	6.73	5.18	5.5	7
	Sexual	4.81	5.92	7	6
	Temporal	4.11	8.14	8	4
	Travel	3.36		9	11
	Situational	2.99	3.70	10	8
	Supernatural	1.87	6.66	11	5
	"No Fears"	13.09	26.64		

Rank coefficient of correlation between fear categories of men and women — +.43

TABLE—3. *Showing the frequency with which the 2 sexes use different types of methods to overcome fear producing situations*

Type of reaction Category	Men %	Women %
"No Fears"	13.09	26.64
Do not know what they do	66.09	54.76
Flight reactions	11.59	11.84
Aggressive reactions	2.99	3.70
Reorganisational reaction	3.74	2.22
Fight reaction	2.40	0.74

Discussion

As seen in Table 2, fears revolving around one's own self were maximum in both the sexes. Some of these referred to the "qualities" inherent in oneself, like one's own feelings of inferiority, lack of self confidence, shyness, poor expression, fear about inadequate personal qualities etc., while others referred to one's own actions like hurting others, doing wrong, being immoral, or being in bad company. The third sub-category of fears referred to oneself as the target of attack because of which the individual himself gets "hurt" like being subject of criticism, being isolated, being let down or cheated etc. In the Indian setting the paramount importance the individual gives or is apprehensive about seems to be one's own personal limitations, the ability in one to appear acceptable in the judgment of others and the ability of oneself to be able to measure up to the standards by which others judge them.

Social fears came next in order among men, while among women this ranked third as animal fears preceeded this category among women. Among social fears, first came fears of social authority like elders, parents, superiors etc. while social situations included fears regarding going to new places, stage fright, facing new situations and the like. In the present sample men reported considerably more fears of social authority than the women, possibly indicating the protective social role women still enjoy in the Indian set up. The expressed fear of social authority is an indicator of the authoritarian structure of our social setup as against a democratic set up characterised by give and take. It is well known that recognition of certain stimuli as fear producing, change with age. So also bases of childhood fears of violence change to socially presented fears as one's maturity and experience increases. Angelino, *et al.*, (1956), Braun (1969) and Bernstein (1969) report that fears about relationship with others are more among women and are reported more by them—a fact which did not seem to hold true with the present Indian sample.

Fear of situations wherein aggression was inherent troubled men, while among women it bottomed the list. The items consisting this group were fights, war, dacoits, murder, horror films etc. This is a finding in line with that of Bubin (1969). It can only be hypothesised that in the Indian setting women have a lesser need to face situations wherein there is an aggressive element as they have less of exposure to them because of the traditionally enjoyed protected place in the society.

Animal fears were more among women. Men were afraid of snakes and lizzards while women showed fear of bats, mice and small crawling insects. Fear of failure was seen next among men which was rather lower down the list among women. This is a moot point whether this sex difference is because of the lower aspirational levels of women or whether it is because of better preparation among them to meet all possible obstructions which reduces the risk of failure or it can well be because they do not anticipate failure as men do and hence do not fear it.

Fear with reference to academic situations like examinations was shown by both sexes more or less to the same degree. As nearly 60 per cent of our sample consisted of students, these fears were considered as transient fears in the group because of intense situational reality. Fear in the area of sex, which was slightly more among women, was seen to a very little extent among both the groups. The main fear in this area was the fear of a member of the opposite sex. Temporal fears like those connected with future, time, death etc were more among women, as also the fears concerning supernatural forces like ghosts, spirits, omens and superstitions. Fear of travel and modes of travel were conspicuous by their absence among women, while they were present to a slight extent among men. Situational fears like those of accidents, electricity, darkness etc. were present equally among both the sexes.

On the whole a tendency to deny having fears as well as fears in 5 major areas—supernatural, temporal, situational, animal and sexual areas—were more among women than among men. However it is only with reference to supernatural and temporal areas was this trend strong and indicated a significant difference. In the other 5 areas—self, social, aggression, travel and failure—the fears were expressed more by men. Here except in the area of self, in the rest the differences seen were significant. The rank coefficient of correlation between the fears of the 2 sexes was +.43. The experiences and situations that lead to fear do have average common content between the 2 sexes, implying that there is sufficient commonness in fear across the sexes in the normal Indian population.

On the basis of the present study a 85 item Fear Survey Schedule has been tentatively developed. Compared with FSS of Wolpe and Lang (1964) the two have 42 items in common or in other words 24 items of FSS—III of Wolpe and Lang (1964) do not seem to have relevance in the Indian setting thus pointing out the possible reason why the initially reported low scoring might have occurred when FSS was used as it was. While preparing the 85 item FSS in the present study, the fre-

quency with which a particular situation was reported was the basis, but after the **first fears were** gone over the categories of fears expressed as 2nd, 3rd or 4th fears **were also taken into** account.

It is well known that complete elimination of fear is impossible, though its control is very essential because intelligently controlled fear has lot of adaptive value. Controlled fear generates an attitude of caution and safeguards the organism against harm. Sensible fear has sociological value as well as fear of consequences and social criticism etc. restrains impulsive behaviour while fear of failure, loss of prestige etc. can lead to careful planning and increased action.

Acting on fears, rather than freezing up is a disciplined and determined way of meeting fear. Fear should be a signal for mobilising one's body and mind to action which should take the shape of planning, organising and laying out to act so as to overcome fear. Trying to repress fear - pretending that it does not exist— solves nothing. In fact not accepting fear may make a person paralysed by fears he fails to anticipate and meet. It is seen that nearly 13 per cent of men and double the number of women—27 per cent—denied fear in the present sample. This significantly greater trend among women in the Indian sample to deny fear is difficult to interpret. Bernstein (1969), Wolpe and Lang (1964), Geer (1965), Grossby and Wilson (1967) have all reported greater score by women on fear schedules. One possibility is that in an open end questionnaire women report less fear than they do on a formal Fear Survey Schedule. If this is so, this will be known in the second stage of the present study while the 85 item FSS prepared in this study is used for a normalisation. On the other hand it is quite possible that Indian women do have lesser fears than their Western counterparts. However one cannot rule out the possibility that Indian women—especially the educated young adults as in the present sample—belong to a set who "tire afraid to talk about their fears.

66 per cent of men and 54 per cent of women in our sample did not know what they do when they are afraid. They neither had a set way of dealing with fear producing situation nor could they think of a way by anticipating it. In other words 80 per cent of individuals evaluated by us either repressed fear or got paralysed by it.

The next common reaction shown at the face of fear belonged to the group of flight reactions, which took the shape of crying, meditating, worshipping, praying etc. This was seen in nearly 11 per cent of the individuals of either sex. Some of these avenues have a social sanction in the Indian set up, but actually they are a call for assistance and help with an effort to avoid or escape fear with the help of others and not by one's own resources. The flight reactions in the face of fear—more so the subtle variants of it especially those with social sanctions—may often go unnoticed but the fact remains that they are potential dangers which may create personality problems or adjustment difficulties, especially in a fast changing social structure

wherein the old methods of coping with stress are no longer as potential as they used to be.

It is well known that anger or aggressive reactions can help counter attack fear and thus blunt the experience of fear. 3 per cent of men and slightly larger segment of women used this when faced with fear. Finally it was a very small minority that is left that showed the positive reactivity at the face of fear—that of reorganising one's resources to overcome fear or that of overcoming fear by excess effort or by a right reaction. If one goes by the self report of the sample the common way by which Indian youth faces fear producing situation is by denying fear overtly while undergoing it acutely within or by getting paralysed at the face of fear. It is only a small minority who face fear positively by planning to overcome it.

Summary

An 85 item Fear Survey Schedule has been developed tentatively for use with educated Indian young adults. The reasons why foreign listed FSS are of very limited use has been pointed out. The manner in which Indian youth face fear producing situation has been surveyed and it is seen that majority of them seek recourse either to the denial of fear or get paralysed at the face of it. It is only a segment who can face fear positively. A need for intensive study of this area seems to be essential and for such a study a basic tool has been evolved.

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