CZU: 373.06:159.922.8 **https://doi.org/10.59295/sum5(165)2023_12**

THE SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF SCHOOL ANXIETY IN ADOLESCENTS

Asla MIRIB , Valentina BODRUG-LUNGU
Moldova State University

The current article proposes a socio-ecological framework of school anxiety to explore adolescent school anxiety (through individual characteristics), in relation to the microsystem (through relationships with parents and peers), the mesosystem (through school organizational culture, relationships with teachers), the exosystem (through the extended school community) and the macrosystem (through social norms and government initiatives).

Considering that the phenomenon of school anxiety among adolescents has several facets, its analysis in the context of psycho-pedagogical and social conditions offers a wider space for understanding the phenomenon. Determinants/risk factors include: individual, family, school, societal factors.

The main points of the presented socio-ecological framework of school anxiety are based on analysis of literature and research. The framework and suggested practices would be strengthened using practical intervention and produce more evidence-based data.

Keywords: *school anxiety, socio-ecological framework, adolescent, microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem.*

CONTEXTUL SOCIO-ECOLOGIC AL ANXIETĂȚII ȘCOLARE LA ADOLESCENȚI

Prezentul articol propune un cadru socio-ecologic al anxietății școlare pentru a explora anxietatea școlară a adolescenților (prin caracteristicile individuale), în raport cu microsistemul (prin relațiile cu părinții și semenii), mezosistemul (prin cultura organizațională școlară, relațiile cu profesorii), exosistemul (prin comunitatea școlară extinsă) și macrosistemul (prin norme sociale și inițiative guvernamentale).

Având in vedere că fenomenul anxietății școlare în rândul adolescenților are mai multe fațete, analiza acestuia în contextul condițiilor psihopedagogice și sociale oferă un spațiu mai larg de înțelegere a fenomenului. Factorii determinanți/de risc includ: factori individuali, familiali, școlari, societali.

Principalele puncte ale cadrului socio-ecologic prezentat al anxietății școlare se bazează pe analiza literaturii și cercetări. Cadrul și practicile sugerate urmează a fi consolidate folosind intervenții practice și producerea de mai multe date bazate pe dovezi.

Cuvinte-cheie**:** *anxietate școlară, cadrul socio-ecologic, adolescent, microsistem, mezosistem, exosistem, macrosistem.*

Introduction

School anxiety is one of the typical problems that is a clear sign of a teenager's school maladaptation, negatively affecting various areas of his life: not only on learning and interactions within the school, but also on health and general level of psychological well-being, as well as communication outside schools.

According to research, school anxiety involves fear and worry about going to school. Doctors may also refer to it as school phobia or school refusal. In an ACHA-National College Health Assessment II national research survey released in 2019, the majority of undergraduates reported stress and anxiety as the top major factors that affected their academic performance negatively (ACHA, 2019). Six out ten of college students experienced ,,overwhelming anxiety," while over 40% were saddled with crippling depression [8].

However, it is important to take steps to address it early on, as it can have significant effects on the adolescent's emotional, and educational development, and social integration.

Psycho-pedagogical and social conditions play a significant role in the appearance, development and maintenance of anxiety in adolescents. When analyzing it, the cumulative risk factors that can lead to anxiety must be taken into account. Specific psycho-pedagogical and social interventions can be effective in preventing and reducing adolescent anxiety, including by leveraging all the components.

Accordingly, the phenomenon of school anxiety among adolescents is multifaceted. Its analysis in the

context of psycho-pedagogical and social conditions offers a wider space for understanding the phenomenon. The determining/risk factors include: individual, family, school, societal factors.

School Anxiety from perspective of ecological systems theory

In our research, assuming that school anxiety is a socio-environmental phenomenon, we propose the application of the ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979) in order to explore the various factors that affect adolescent' school anxiety.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is one of the most accepted explanations regarding the influence of social environments on human development. This theory states that the environment in which people grow up influences every aspect of their lives.

Social factors determine the way of thinking, emotions, likes and dislikes, wellbing of people. If this environment can be changed, people can change. The same can happen if one's social position/role changes in one of the identified systems [11]: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem.

Reviewing several publications [1; 10], we conclude that Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework for human development is concerned with systems in society and suggests that for adolescent, the family is the first key factor of development, followed by school and community, with each adolescent belonging to a broader network of groups and systems.

The socio-ecological framework of school anxiety outlines five levels of interconnected layers (Figure 1). The levels begin with the individual and move in concentric rings outward through the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem. Below we briefly present the five layers of the socio-ecological framework with the respective components relevant to the connection with school anxiety in adolescents.

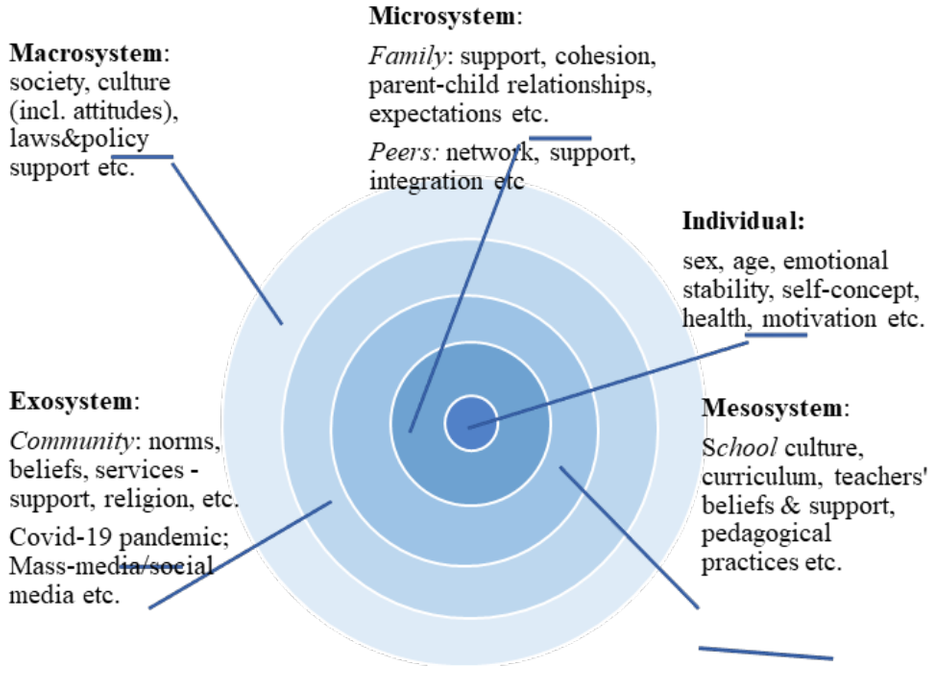
Individual

The inner portion of the socio-ecological framework represents the individual student and the associated characteristics at the individual level that relate to him. Based on the existing literature, we have identified several distinct aspects of an individual student that can correlate with school anxiety: sex, age, health, emotional stability, self-concept, learning motivation, knowledge, attitude & skills, etc.

Some authors suggest the interconditionallity between learning motivation and anxiety [6].

Thus, schools seeking to prevent and reduce school anxiety can do so by creating friendly environment, high academic motivation, building emotional stability – management of emotions, and psychological support to students.

Figure 1. The socio-ecological framework of adolescent' school anxiety.



Microsystem

Made up of the groups that have direct contact with the individual and key role in his life. The importance of a student's relationship with family has been illustrated by several authors. We note that *family framework* includes different key components such support, cohesion, parent-child relationships, parents' beliefs &expectations, family social status etc. Studies have shown that when parents provide support and show care, compassion, and encouragement toward academic endeavor, young people are more likely to exhibit greater connectedness to school (Benner et al., 2008; Brewster & Bowen, 2004; Carter,McGee, Taylor, &Williams, 2007; Wang & Eccles, 2012) [*Apud* 1]. Also, authors confirm interconnection between parents' education anxiety and children's academic burnout [7].

At the same time, peers play a very important role in the lives of teenagers through networking, the integration of students in the network. *Peer support* inside and outside the school is significant. The literature suggests that peers may facilitate adolescent students' feelings of being connected to school through social and academic support (Wentzel, 1998), acceptance (Wang & Eccles, 2012), trust (Garcia-Reid, Reid, & Peterson, 2005), or merely being present (e.g., having friends at school; Whitlock, 2006). [apud 1]

All the components in concrete contexts (friendly) can prevent the school anxiety of the student or become a risk factor.

Mesosystem

The relationships between the groups from the second system with significant

impact on individual. At the mesosystem level, we have placed the educational institution (school) with several components, which directly and indirectly can cause or reduce school anxiety, as follows:

school organizational culture (including anti-bullying policy and practices), curriculum/ extracurricular activities, teachers' beliefs & support, pedagogical practices and resources, relationships students – teachers, students – teachers- parents, psychological assistance if needed, etc.

The importance of teachers towards student outcomes has been widely studied (e.g., Anderman, 2002; Hattie, 2009; Wang & Eccles, 2012). In a large-scale synthesis of research, Hattie (2009) ranked a teacher-student relationship (large effect size, d = .72) as an important contributor to enhancing academic outcomes in students [*Apud* 1]. Future research is needed to evaluate what specific interventions are needed for the themes of teacher support to prevent and decrease students' school anxiety.

Exosystem: factors that affect an individual's life but, the elements of this system don't have a direct relationship with the individual. The exosystem represents the community surrounding the school and encompasses the local neighbourhood, grandparents and extended families (although depending on the family structure theymay also reside in themicrosystem), local businesses, and community groups (Saab, 2009) [9].

Among them we mention the role of the community with the norms, traditions, religion, beliefs and partnership with school and parents, etc. A special role belongs to the existence of support services for families with children, children affected by depression, school anxiety, etc.

We note that adolescence is a challenging period of life, with over 10% of youth experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depression [3]. Some authors have mentioned that adolescence is a critical period for the emergence and exacerbation of depression and anxiety symptoms (Gruber, Prinstein, Clark, Rottenberg, Abramowitz, Albano and Davila [4]), so it is possible that increases in symptoms from the pre-COVID to the COVID-19 assessments could be part of a developmentally normative process. Accordingly, specialized services are needed at the community level.

It should be noted that the absence of external resilience-promoting resources, such as support from friends and social programs, and the loss of feelings of security and safety during times of emergency [2], such as the COVID-19 pandemic, are likely to increase the susceptibility to symptoms of anxiety and depression among adolescents [5].

Macrosystem

Contains those cultural elements that affect the individual and everyone around them. The macrosystem can be influential in the processes of daily school practice, particularly on how schools orient their priorities and goals, school' capacity to offer safe and friendly space and environment to students. For example, in case of the pressure by governments and legislation to prioritise academic outcomes at the macrosystem le-

vel, above other important factors in the school system, can conduct to teachers' burnout. Increased teacher stress may affect the student-teacher relationship found to be important for preventing students' anxiety.

The main points of the presented socio-ecological framework of school anxiety is based on analysis of literature and research. The framework and suggested practices would be strengthened using practical intervention and produce more evidence-based data.

Conclusions

We conclude that Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework for human development is concerned with systems in society and suggests that for adolescent, the family is the first key factor of development, followed by school and community, with each adolescent interacting in a different way with the components from systems.

For some students, the fear and worry associated with school anxiety are related to a specific cause, such as being bullied or having a bad experience at school. For others, the anxiety may be more general and related to social or performance anxiety. Students may develop anxiety if they have been home for a long period, such as because of Covid-19 pandemic.

Parents and teachers should avoid reacting to the adolescent's anxiety in a way that reinforces it. This means avoiding arguments, bribes, or threats. Interventions may include making adjustments to the adolescent's schedule, providing support in the classroom, or involving the adolescent in social activities outside of school.

It is also important for parents and teachers to provide support to students with school anxiety. This support may take the form of: talking with the adolescent about their anxiety and fears; helping the adolescent develop healthy coping mechanisms; modeling positive behavior; teaching the child relaxation techniques; staying involved in the communication with adolescent.

Therefore, a collaborative team approach that involves the adolescent, their parents or caregivers, school personnel, and mental health professionals is often necessary.

Education institutions should offer therapeutic programs aiming to contribute to the mental health of adolescents that have been critically diminished. In addition, schools should ensure educational support programs and friendly environment.

References:

1. ALLEN, K.-A., VELLA-BRODRICK, D., WATERS, L. Fostering School Belonging in Secondary Schools Using a Socio-Ecological Framework In: *The Australian Educational and Developmental Psychologist,* June 2016, no. 3(1), p. 1-25, p. 97-121. DOI: 10.1017/edp.2016.5
2. CASALE, S., FLETT, G. L. Interpersonally-Based Fears during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Reflections on the Fear of Missing out and the Fear of Not Mattering Constructs. In: *Clin. Neuropsychiatry* 2020, no. 17, p. 88-93.
3. CONSTANTINI, K., MARKUS, I., EPEL, N., JAKOBOVICH, R., GEPNER, Y., LEV-ARI, S. Continued Participation of Israeli Adolescents in Online Sports Programs during the COVID-19 Pandemic Is Associated with Higher Resilience. In: *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2021 April, no. 18(8), p. 43-86. Published online 2021 Apr 20. DOI: 10.3390/ijerph18084386.
4. GRUBER, J., PRINSTEIN, M. J., CLARK, L. A., ROTTENBERG, J., ABRAMOWITZ, J.S., ALBANO, A. M. & DAVILA, J. Mental health and clinical psychological science in the time of COVID-19: Challenges, opportunities, and a call to action. In: *American Psychologist*. 2020 Advance online publication. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/amp0000707
5. HEATHERTON, T. F., WYLAND, C. L. Assessing Self-Estee; APA: Washington, DC, USA, 2003.
6. MORADI, M., REZA, J. M. Role Of The Motivation And Anxiety In Learning English In: *Multicultural Education*, Volume 7, Issue 9, 2021, p. 609-614. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.5895086. http://ijdri.com/me/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/64.pdf
7. WU, K., WANG, F., WANG, W. & LI, Y. Parents' Education Anxiety and Children's Academic Burnout: The Role of Parental Burnout and Family Function In: *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2022, Volume 12, 2021. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.764824
8. BOUCHRIKA, I. 50 Current Student Stress Statistics: 2023 Data, Analysis & Predictions. January 2023. https://research.com/education/student-stress-statistics (accessed on 10.02.2023).

9. SAAB, H. The school as a setting to promote student health. Retrieved from, 2009. http://qspace.library.queensu.ca (accessed on 15.02.2023).
10. Teachers and the Teaching of Self-Regulated Learning (SRL): The Emergence of an Integrative, Ecological Model of SRL-in-Context. https://www.mdpi.com/2227-7102/10/4/98 (accessed on 10.02.2023).
11. https://www.scu.edu/oml/about-us/theoretical-framework/#:~:text=Bronfenbrenner's%20ecological%20systems%20theory%20is,every%20facet%20of%20your%20life (accessed on 10.02.2023).

Data About Authors:
Asla MIRIB**,** Drd., Doctoral School of Social Sciences and Education, Moldova State University
E-mail:
ORCID: 0009-0009-8461-7350

Valentina BODRUG-LUNGU, Doctor Habilitatis in Pedagogical Sciences, University Professor, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, Sociology and Social Work; Moldova State University
E-mail: valbodrug@mail.ru
ORCID: 0000-0002-2957-2796

Presented on 01.03.2023