



A Comparative Study of The Level of Psychological Anxiety During The Examination Period Among Students of The Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences

Amad Sarmad Abdul Munem ¹, Marwan Mustafa Sami ², Halah Sinan Mohammed Ali ³

^{1,2,3} University of Baghdad , College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences

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Abstract

Exam anxiety is common phenomenon among students, natural feeling arises from the stress and psychological pressure associated with exam preparation and high expectations regarding academic performance. Some of scientific studies indicate that the university environment may contain a number of academic and psychological pressures, as the density of some course materials the accumulation of assignments and frequent tests as family and societal expectations and competition among students, all contributes to increased anxiety levels during exam periods. The research problem lies in identifying certain factors that clearly contribute to student anxiety during exam periods, direct impact on academic achievement and students' mental and physical health. Aims of this study to identify gender differences in exam anxiety. Descriptive survey methodology was employed, and the research sample consisted of (100) students fourth-year stage (male and female) from Physical Education and Sports Sciences College, the exam anxiety test was administered electronically via a questionnaire. Results showed a significant difference between genders with females exhibiting higher levels of exam anxiety than males. This research findings recommend raising awareness among teachers and educational specialists about exam anxiety among students, a significant factor negatively impacting academic success, recommends conducting lectures, seminars and workshops led by specialists in psychology and psychiatry to help students reduce anxiety and enhance their ability to cope with exam pressures.

Keywords: Exam Anxiety, SARSON Scale.

¹ University of Baghdad , College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences
amad.s@cope.uobaghdad.edu.iq

² University of Baghdad , College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences
marwan.m@cope.uobaghdad.edu.iq

³ University of Baghdad , College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences
hala.s@cope.uobaghdad.edu.iq



Introduction

Exam anxiety is a common phenomenon among students, it's a natural feeling arising from the tension and psychological pressure associated with exam preparation and the high expectations regarding academic performance. The causes and effects of this anxiety are diverse, encompassing psychological and social pressures placed on the student. Anxiety can be multidimensional: it may serve as a driving force that motivates performance and fosters self-development and capability enhancement, or it may act as an obstacle that hinders concentration and academic achievement. It poses a psychological challenge by affecting a student's ability to comprehend and recall information at the critical moment, potentially leading to results that fall short of expectations despite the effort invested in preparation.

Abu Tabanja (2021), note that sports psychology aims to achieve a set of interconnected goals, seeking to understand and explain human behavior, as well as to identify the causes behind it and the factors influencing it (Abu-Tabanja et al. n.d.). Furthermore, psychology seeks to predict human behavior based on the relationships between various psychological phenomena, thereby enabling the control of behavior—modifying, directing, and improving it toward desirable outcomes. These outcomes include building social relationships, influencing others, managing anger, avoiding anxiety and rebelliousness, and promoting mental health through the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of psychological disorders.

This is corroborated by Sami (2025), who affirm that human behavior remains a central subject of study in sports psychology (Sami et al. 2025); manifestations of such behavior include psychological anxiety, personality traits, motivation, psychological stress, burnout, sports-related violence, and sports-related aggression. Scientific studies indicate that the university environment entails various academic and psychological stressors—such as heavy course loads, the accumulation of assignments, frequent exams, family and societal expectations, and peer competition—which can contribute to heightened anxiety levels among some students during exam periods. Anxiety levels vary from student to student based on factors such as motivation, self-confidence, academic preparedness, and the ability to cope with stress. This is corroborated by Nkouonlack (2025), who identify depression, anxiety, and stress as major sources of distress for university students (Nkouonlack et al. 2025; Lian & Atiyah, 2024), noting their negative impact on academic achievement as well as psychological and social well-being.

In this context, Roone (2019) note that the word "exam" triggers varying degrees of anxiety in students, depending on the exam's importance, the subject's difficulty, and the student's level of preparation (Roome & Soan 2019). Subjects perceived as difficult provoke higher levels of anxiety; furthermore, exam anxiety—as a psychological state—can negatively affect individuals across various life domains, particularly students facing various examinations.



A Spielberg (1980) study who introduced the Test Anxiety Inventory (TAI). This instrument has been one of the most widely used measures since 1980 in research concerning academic or test anxiety (Kubíková et al. 2018), categorizing anxiety into two primary dimensions: cognitive anxiety and emotional anxiety. This research highlights the primary causes of student anxiety during examinations and its psychological, physical, and academic impacts. It also aims to identify strategies and methods that can help alleviate anxiety and stress while enhancing academic performance. The study is motivated by the significance of this issue and its influence on the quality of education; its primary objective is to offer effective recommendations that assist students in overcoming these pressures to achieve outstanding academic results.

Consequently, the research addresses the factors that significantly contribute to student anxiety during exams—a condition that directly affects academic achievement as well as mental and physical well-being. Understanding this phenomenon facilitates the development of guidance and counseling programs designed to help students reduce exam anxiety, optimize their performance during tests, and foster mental health, thereby striking a balance between academic success and personal well-being.

Methods

This study aimed to identify anxiety levels among students during the examination period and to compare these levels between male and female students. It hypothesized the existence of a statistically significant difference in anxiety levels between male and female students during the examination period. The study employed a descriptive survey method, as it was best suited to the nature of the research. The research population is defined as the aggregate of all subjects under study (Dhari & Abbas, 2026). The population was identified as fourth-year students at the College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences, University of Baghdad, for the 2024/2025 academic year, totaling 408 students. A purposive sample of 120 students (representing 30% of the total population) was selected, comprising 60 males and 60 females.

The Sarason Test-Anxiety Scale was used; this is a questionnaire designed to measure psychological anxiety (specifically test anxiety). Originally developed by Spielberg (1980), the questionnaire consists of 38 items related to test anxiety, as detailed in Appendix 1.

A pilot study was conducted to assess the clarity of the test anxiety scale's instructions and items, to identify any statements that were ambiguous in terms of wording, language, or content for the research sample, and to determine the time required to complete the questionnaire. A pilot study was conducted on a sample of 20 fourth-year students (10 males and 10 females) on Tuesday, April 8, 2025. Paper-based questionnaires were distributed to the selected sample to identify potential issues researchers might face during the main experiment and data collection. The pilot study revealed several challenges: the total time required to complete the paper questionnaire ranged from 15 to 20 minutes; many items were left unanswered due to the length of the

questionnaire; some questionnaires were damaged by erasing or crossing out answers; and, finally, some respondents selected multiple answers for a single statement, which constitutes an error.

The main experiment involved administering the questionnaire to a sample of 100 fourth-year students from the College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences at the University of Baghdad. The sample consisted of 50 male students (excluding the 10 who participated in the pilot study) and 50 female students (excluding the 10 who participated in the pilot study). The questionnaire was distributed electronically via Google Forms and shared with students through Google Classroom. Before the students began answering the questionnaire online, the data entry process was explained to them directly to facilitate data collection and classification, and to ensure robust results through the platform's algorithmic processing.

Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS (Version 17.10) to process the data; the arithmetic mean, standard deviation, and independent samples t-test were utilized.

Results

Table 1. Shows the arithmetic means, standard deviations, percentages, and sample trends for the Test Anxiety Scale (Sarason) among students of the College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences, University of Baghdad

Male Students					
N	Question	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation	Percentage	Sample trend
1	I feel annoyed with every question the teacher asks me to make sure I benefit and learn the lesson.	2.44	16.94	61%	Disagree
2	I am worried about whether I will be promoted from my current grade to the next grade at the end of the year.	2.28	26.85	57%	Agree
3	I feel nervous if the teacher asks me to stand up and read aloud.	2.21	14.97	55%	Disagree
4	When the teacher asks me to solve some matters on the board, I hope to myself that he will ask someone else to do that and not from me.	2.58	16.21	65%	Disagree
5	While I sleep, I dream a lot about exams.	2.19	11.73	55%	disagree
6	My heart rate increases when exams date approach.	2.40	14.43	60%	Strongly disagree
7	I feel very anxious when I get ready for bed because I think about how I will do on the exam tomorrow	2.60	21.18	65%	Strongly disagree
8	My writing hand trembles when the teacher asks me to write on the board in front of my class.	2.14	16.21	53%	Disagree
9	I feel more nervous when the exam date approaches than my fellow students.	2.23	15.06	56%	Disagree



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10	When I am at home and think about tomorrow's lessons, I feel afraid that I will give wrong answers.	2.42	14.76	60%	Disagree
11	If I miss school due to illness, I feel that my performance in homework will be lower than that of other students.	2.81	22.63	70%	Agree
12	When I think about the next day's lessons, I worry that my performance in some lessons will not be acceptable.	2.60	18.18	65%	Agree
13	I feel nauseous, trembling, or dizzy when the teacher asks a question to determine how much I learned from the lesson.	2.47	20.81	62%	Disagree
14	I feel confused and stressed if the teacher asks me a question and I answer it wrong.	2.77	26.41	69%	Agree
15	I feel afraid of every situation that involves an exam.	2.37	14.73	59%	Disagree
16	I feel very upset before taking the exam.	2.28	20.22	57%	Disagree
17	After finishing the exam, I feel nervous about my performance in this exam.	2.47	23.33	62%	Agree
18	Sometimes I feel that my performance in the exam I took was bad, no matter how much I studied and prepared for it.	2.49	16.32	62%	Agree
19	I feel that my writing hand is shaking a bit during the exam	2.23	18.55	56%	Disagree
20	I am afraid of failing in my performance if I know that the teacher will give us an exam.	2.56	17.16	64%	Disagree
21	I feel that I forget a lot of information during the exam that I remembered before it started.	3.00	31.54	75%	Agree
22	I wish I did not feel so upset about the exam.	2.72	21.93	68%	Agree
23	I feel anxious if the teacher tells me he wants to give us a test	2.37	15.15	59%	Disagree
24	I feel that I will perform poorly while answering the exam.	2.53	20.02	63%	Disagree
25	Sometimes when I am on my way to school, I am afraid that the teacher will give us a surprise exam.	2.44	14.97	61%	Disagree
26	I feel a severe headache before and during the exam.	2.30	16.56	58%	Disagree
27	My fear of failure hinders my performance and progress on the exam.	2.77	21.27	69%	Disagree
28	I feel anxious when the teacher announces how much time is left until the exam ends.	2.84	31.37	71%	Agree
29	I feel afraid while waiting for the exam question papers to be distributed	2.70	23.18	67%	Strongly disagree
30	I feel anxious during the exam that I will not have enough time to answer.	2.51	21.56	63%	Disagree
31	I feel anxious while waiting to enter the exam hall.	2.70	23.92	67%	Agree
32	I feel afraid of school because it reminds me of exams.	2.35	19.28	59%	Disagree



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33	I feel uncomfortable while students in the yard talk about an upcoming exam.	2.37	17.94	59%	Disagree
34	Sweat secretion increases on my hands or face during the exam.	2.30	18.06	58%	Disagree
35	I feel stressed and confused as I prepare for my daily exam.	2.35	16.48	59%	Disagree
36	I often feel anxious while preparing for the exam the day before it is due.	2.63	24.96	66%	Agree
37	I always feel nervous and confused when preparing for the final exam.	2.67	35.07	67%	Strongly disagree
38	I feel anxious when I listen to the teacher announcing the dates of the upcoming exams.	2.56	15.29	64%	Disagree

Table 2. Presents the arithmetic means, standard deviations, percentages, and sample trends for the Test Anxiety Scale (Sarason) among female students at the College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences, University of Baghdad

Female Students					
N	Question	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation	Percentage	Sample trend
1	I feel annoyed with every question the teacher asks me to make sure I benefit and learn the lesson.	2.44	16.94	61%	Disagree
2	I am worried about whether I will be promoted from my current grade to the next grade at the end of the year.	2.28	26.85	57%	Agree
3	I feel nervous if the teacher asks me to stand up and read aloud.	2.21	14.97	55%	Disagree
4	When the teacher asks me to solve some matters on the board, I hope to myself that he will ask someone else to do that and not from me.	2.58	16.21	65%	Agree
5	While I sleep, I dream a lot about exams.	2.19	11.73	55%	Strongly disagree
6	My heart rate increases when exams date approach.	2.40	14.43	60%	Agree
7	I feel very anxious when I get ready for bed because I think about how I will do on the exam tomorrow	2.60	21.18	65%	Agree
8	My writing hand trembles when the teacher asks me to write on the board in front of my class.	2.14	16.21	53%	Disagree
9	I feel more nervous when the exam date approaches than my fellow students.	2.23	15.06	56%	Disagree
10	When I am at home and think about tomorrow's lessons, I feel afraid that I will give wrong answers.	2.42	14.76	60%	Agree
11	If I miss school due to illness, I feel that my performance in homework will be lower than that of other students.	2.81	22.63	70%	Agree



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12	When I think about the next day's lessons, I worry that my performance in some lessons will not be acceptable.	2.60	18.18	65%	Agree
13	I feel nauseous, trembling, or dizzy when the teacher asks a question to determine how much I learned from the lesson.	2.47	20.81	62%	Agree
14	I feel confused and stressed if the teacher asks me a question and I answer it wrong.	2.77	26.41	69%	Agree
15	I feel afraid of every situation that involves an exam.	2.37	14.73	59%	Disagree
16	I feel very upset before taking the exam.	2.28	20.22	57%	Disagree
17	After finishing the exam, I feel nervous about my performance in this exam.	2.47	23.33	62%	Agree
18	Sometimes I feel that my performance in the exam I took was bad, no matter how much I studied and prepared for it.	2.49	16.32	62%	Disagree
19	I feel that my writing hand is shaking a bit during the exam	2.23	18.55	56%	Disagree
20	I am afraid of failing in my performance if I know that the teacher will give us an exam.	2.56	17.16	64%	Agree
21	I feel that I forget a lot of information during the exam that I remembered before it started.	3.00	31.54	75%	Agree
22	I wish I did not feel so upset about the exam.	2.72	21.93	68%	Agree
23	I feel anxious if the teacher tells me he wants to give us a test	2.37	15.15	59%	Agree
24	I feel that I will perform poorly while answering the exam.	2.53	20.02	63%	Agree
25	Sometimes when I am on my way to school, I am afraid that the teacher will give us a surprise exam.	2.44	14.97	61%	Disagree
26	I feel a severe headache before and during the exam.	2.30	16.56	58%	Disagree
27	My fear of failure hinders my performance and progress on the exam.	2.77	21.27	69%	Agree
28	I feel anxious when the teacher announces how much time is left until the exam ends.	2.84	31.37	71%	Agree
29	I feel afraid while waiting for the exam question papers to be distributed	2.70	23.18	67%	Agree
30	I feel anxious during the exam that I will not have enough time to answer.	2.51	21.56	63%	Disagree
31	I feel anxious while waiting to enter the exam hall.	2.70	23.92	67%	Agree
32	I feel afraid of school because it reminds me of exams.	2.35	19.28	59%	Disagree
33	I feel uncomfortable while students in the yard talk about an upcoming exam.	2.37	17.94	59%	Disagree
34	Sweat secretion increases on my hands or face during the exam.	2.30	18.06	58%	Agree
35	I feel stressed and confused as I prepare for my daily exam.	2.35	16.48	59%	Disagree



36	I often feel anxious while preparing for the exam the day before it is due.	2.63	24.96	66%	Agree
37	I always feel nervous and confused when preparing for the final exam.	2.67	35.07	67%	Agree
38	I feel anxious when I listen to the teacher announcing the dates of the upcoming exams.	2.56	15.29	64%	Disagree

Table 3. Shows the arithmetic mean and standard deviation results for the selected sample of students (males and females) on the Sarason Test Anxiety Scale

	Gender	Number	Standard Deviation	Arithmetic Mean
Exam Anxiety	Male Students	50	126.3	34.1
	Female Students	50	178.3	24.3

Table 4. Shows the Levene's test value and the calculated t-value for the two selected samples of students (males and females) on the Sarason Test Anxiety Scale

Exam Anxiety	Levene's Test		Independent Samples Test				Statistical significance
	F	Sig.	Calculated t-value	DF	Sig. (2-tailed)	Std. Error Difference	
	11.488	0.001	8.776	98	0.000	5.927	Significant

At the significance level of 0.05.

Discussion

The results of Table No. (1) of the male students' answers showed that there were a number of statements characterized by high selection rates. We find that the statement No. (21), which states (I feel that I forget a lot of information in the exam that I remembered before it began), came in first place in terms of the selection percentage among the students, as the percentage reached (79%), which indicates that the tendency of the sample members was towards agreeing with this statement. Statement No. (7), which states (I feel very anxious when I prepare for sleep as a result of thinking about what my performance will be in the exam tomorrow), came in second place in terms of the percentage of choice among students, as the percentage reached (76%), which indicates that the sample members' tendency was towards strongly agreeing with this statement.

Finally, statement number (37), which states (I always feel nervous and confused when I prepare for the final exam), came in third place in terms of the percentage of choice among students, as the percentage reached (75%), which indicates that the sample members' tendency was towards strongly agreeing with this statement. This is what is confirmed by Liu (2024) that anxiety is an emotional state that the student experiences, including severe and high-level anxiety (Liu & Wang 2024), which hinders the students in taking their exams, as it generates inappropriate



responses within the examination situation, such as preoccupation with that study, failure, success, or other external preoccupations, and this preoccupation interferes with the situation required by the student and may be the reason for the appearance of anxiety in them in the theoretical exam.

While the results of Table No. (2) for the responses of female students showed that there were a number of statements characterized by high selection rates, we find that the statement No. (21), which states (I feel that I am forgetting a lot of information in the exam that I remembered before it began) came in first place in terms of the selection percentage among the students, as the percentage reached (75%), which indicates that the tendency of the sample members was towards agreeing with this statement, and it is similar to the choice of male students in this particular statement. Statement No. (28), which states (I feel anxious when the teacher announces how much time remains until the end of the exam), came in second place in terms of the percentage of choice among students, as the percentage reached (71%), which indicates that the sample members' tendency was towards agreeing with this statement.

Finally, statement number (11), which states (If I am absent from school as a result of illness, I feel that my performance of school duties will be lower than other students), came in third place in terms of the percentage of choice among students, as the percentage reached (70%), which indicates that the sample members' tendency was towards agreeing with this statement. From these results in Tables No. (1) and Table No. (2), it is clear that differences in gender play an important role in determining the direction of the sample, as well as in the percentages of similarity in choosing to answer the statements of the scale used.

This is confirmed where test anxiety refers to the feeling of excessive anxiety, fear, and physical tension that individuals may experience before, during, or after taking a test. It is a common phenomenon among students, and can have a significant impact on their academic performance and psychological well-being (Symes & Putwain 2020). This is what Rani 2025 indicated Exam anxiety is characterized by distress and tension related to taking the exam, and it can be a motivator or an obstacle to performance, as motivating anxiety encourages one to perform seriously on the exam, while obstructive anxiety interferes to negatively affect performance (Rani 2025).

While the results of Table No. (3) showed the values of the arithmetic means for the male and female students, where the value of the arithmetic mean for the (male) students reached (126.3), which is less than the value of the arithmetic mean for the (female) students (178.3), while the value of the standard deviation for the (male) students reached (34.1), which is higher than the value of the standard deviation for the (female) students, which is (24.3), and this value indicates the measure of dispersion, as The value of the standard deviation for (females) is lower. This indicates that the dispersion rate for (females) is better and has greater credibility and accuracy than the answers of (males). In this regard, Lane (2020) explains this result by saying that a high level of perceived stress results in a high level of anxiety and fear of failure and failure in studies,



which may lead to frustration and loss of hope, which results in a decrease in motivation for achievement (Lane et al. 2020).

The results of Table No. (4) showed the value of the Levene test, where the calculated F value was (11.488), and the significance value for this test is equal to (0.001), and since the significance value is less than the significance level of (0.05), this indicates the rejection of the zero equation and the acceptance of the alternative equation, meaning that there are significant differences between the genders. The (T-test) test is conducted for independent samples between (males and females), where the calculated value of (T) reached (8.776), at a degree of freedom (48), and the value of (Sig) was equal to (0.000), which is less than the significance level of (0.05). This indicates the presence of statistically significant differences in favor of the larger arithmetic mean, and since the arithmetic mean for the (female) students is greater than the value of the arithmetic means for the (male) students (Reilly et al. 2019), if Exam anxiety among females is greater than exam anxiety among males.

This difference in exam anxiety between the sexes can be attributed to the nature of human makeup; females tend to be highly conscientious and pay greater attention to exam-related details, whereas males often display an attitude of indifference and lack of anxiety regarding exam performance. As noted by Rashid (2025), these differences arise because female students in their fourth year of study possess higher levels of ambition to achieve their goals—specifically, completing their university education and attaining higher academic grades—compared to their male counterparts. These differences are clearly reflected in the methods of preparation and the number of hours female students dedicate to studying. This is corroborated by Putwain (2024), who identifies exam anxiety as a common issue among students; while such anxiety is normal when kept within reasonable limits, its manifestations vary from student to student (Putwain 2024). In some cases, the symptoms are pronounced, affecting the ability to recall academic material or answer questions, and leading to issues such as impaired concentration, distracted attention, tension, and irritability. The research concluded that female students in the fourth year at the College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences, University of Baghdad, experience higher levels of exam anxiety than their male counterparts.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that the causes of elevated exam anxiety among students at the College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences (University of Baghdad) be investigated and that appropriate measures be taken to address the issue. Furthermore, additional studies should be conducted to examine the relationship between exam anxiety and academic achievement across different samples and educational stages. It is also essential to raise awareness among teachers and educational specialists regarding the importance of addressing student exam anxiety, as it is a significant factor that negatively impacts academic success. Finally, efforts should be made to organize lectures, seminars, and workshops facilitated by psychology and



psychiatry specialists to help students alleviate anxiety and enhance their ability to cope with exam-related pressures.

Appendix I

Sarson Test Anxiety Scale

N	Question	I strongly agree	I agree	I don't agree	I strongly disagree
1	I feel annoyed with every question the teacher asks me to make sure I benefit and learn the lesson.				
2	I am worried about whether I will be promoted from my current grade to the next grade at the end of the year.				
3	I feel nervous if the teacher asks me to stand up and read aloud.				
4	When the teacher asks me to solve some matters on the board, I hope to myself that he will ask someone else to do that and not from me.				
5	While I sleep, I dream a lot about exams.				
6	My heart rate increases when exams date approach.				
7	I feel very anxious when I get ready for bed because I think about how I will do on the exam tomorrow				
8	My writing hand trembles when the teacher asks me to write on the board in front of my class.				
9	I feel more nervous when the exam date approaches than my fellow students.				
10	When I am at home and think about tomorrow's lessons, I feel afraid that I will give wrong answers.				
11	If I miss school due to illness, I feel that my performance in homework will be lower than that of other students.				
12	When I think about the next day's lessons, I worry that my performance in some lessons will not be acceptable.				
13	I feel nauseous, trembling, or dizzy when the teacher asks a question to determine how much I learned from the lesson.				
14	I feel confused and stressed if the teacher asks me a question and I answer it wrong.				
15	I feel afraid of every situation that involves an exam.				
16	I feel very upset before taking the exam.				
17	After finishing the exam, I feel nervous about my performance in this exam.				
18	Sometimes I feel that my performance in the exam I took was bad, no matter how much I studied and prepared for it.				
19	I feel that my writing hand is shaking a bit during the exam				
20	I am afraid of failing in my performance if I know that the teacher will give us an exam.				



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- 21 I feel that I forget a lot of information during the exam that I remembered before it started.
 - 22 I wish I did not feel so upset about the exam.
 - 23 I feel anxious if the teacher tells me he wants to give us a test
 - 24 I feel that I will perform poorly while answering the exam.
 - 25 Sometimes when I am on my way to school, I am afraid that the teacher will give us a surprise exam.
 - 26 I feel a severe headache before and during the exam.
 - 27 My fear of failure hinders my performance and progress on the exam.
 - 28 I feel anxious when the teacher announces how much time is left until the exam ends.
 - 29 I feel afraid while waiting for the exam question papers to be distributed
 - 30 I feel anxious during the exam that I will not have enough time to answer.
 - 31 I feel anxious while waiting to enter the exam hall.
 - 32 I feel afraid of school because it reminds me of exams.
 - 33 I feel uncomfortable while students in the yard talk about an upcoming exam.
 - 34 Sweat secretion increases on my hands or face during the exam.
 - 35 I feel stressed and confused as I prepare for my daily exam.
 - 36 I often feel anxious while preparing for the exam the day before it is due.
 - 37 I always feel nervous and confused when preparing for the final exam.
 - 38 I feel anxious when I listen to the teacher announcing the dates of the upcoming exams.
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