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6 Out Of Every 10 University Students Present "mathematical Anxiety" Or Fear Of This Subject, According To A Study

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Article Date: 02 Apr 2009 - 7:00 PDT

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6 out of every 10 university students, regardless their field of study, present any symptom of anxiety when it comes to deal with Mathematics, according to a research work carried out at the University of Granada. In addition, there are significant differences between men and women in this sense, as men suffer less anxiety when it comes to deal with mathematical tasks (47% of men against 62% of women).

The research has been carried out by professors Patricia Pérez-Tyteca, Enrique Castro, Isidoro Segovia, Encarnación Castro and Francisco Fernández, of the department of Didactics of Mathematics of the UGR, and Francisco Cano, of the department of Evolutionary and Education Psychology. This study was carried out in a sample consisting of 885 first-year students from 23 different degrees given at the UGR which include the subject of Mathematics, both compulsory and core. The sample included four of the five university fields of study: Health Sciences, Experimental Sciences, Technical Education and Social Sciences.

The symptoms of mathematical anxiety

The researchers applied to the students the so-called Fennema-Sherman Mathematics Attitudes Scales, a questionnaire validated by experts from all over the world which has been used since the 70s; the student underwent such questionnaire at the beginning of the second four-month period.

Mathematical anxiety appears through a series of symptoms "such as tension, nervousness, concern, worry, edginess, impatience, confusion, fear and mental block" when dealing with the subject of Mathematics, according to the researchers of the University of Granada.

This work has also revealed that there are significant differences in the students' attitude towards Mathematics depending on their field of study. Thus, the students of degrees of the field of Health Sciences are those who fear Mathematics the most (this is, show more anxiety), unlike those of Technical Education, who are the less concerned.

According to the researchers, "an indirect effect of mathematical anxiety is that of avoiding studies related to Mathematics, which later conditions the type of degree they can choose". In other words, many students choose degrees different to those they preferred and in which they would be really good in many cases in order to avoid studying subjects connected with Mathematics.

University of Granada
<http://www.ugr.es>

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