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Most undergraduates 'show fear when asked to do maths'
Choose easy joke degrees as a result

By **Lewis Page** • **Get more from this author**

Posted in Biology, 2nd April 2009 10:46 GMT

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Six out of every ten university students are afraid of mathematics to the point where it deters them from studying technical subjects, according to new research. The proportion of students who "show symptoms of anxiety" regarding maths is also significantly higher among females than males.

In a survey of 885 first-year undergraduates reading 23 different subjects at the University of Granada, 47 per cent of men showed symptoms "such as tension, nervousness, concern, worry, edginess, impatience, confusion, fear and mental block" when asked to tackle mathematical tasks. Among women, 62 per cent showed a similar response.

The technique used to measure maths-related anxiety was the Fennema-Sherman Mathematics Attitudes Scales, apparently. The research was carried out by maths professors Patricia Pérez-Tyteca, Enrique Castro, Isidoro Segovia, Encarnación Castro and Francisco Fernández, and educational-psych prof Francisco Cano.

According to the University of Granada, the allied mathematicians found that:

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> **"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.**

The University says that the work has been published in the journals *Indivisa: Boletín de Estudios e Investigación*, *Investigación en Educación Matemática* and *Revista de Educación de la Universidad de Granada*. ®

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