



CALIFORNIA STATE SCIENCE FAIR 2008 PROJECT SUMMARY

Name(s) A. M. Fiona Alfait	Project Number J0301
Project Title The Impact of Age and Socioeconomic Status on Childhood Fears	
<p style="text-align: center;">Abstract</p> <p>Objectives/Goals Though studies have shown children's fears correlate with age, little is known of the influence of socioeconomic status (SES) on childhood fears. The purpose of this study was to examine the manner and extent to which socioeconomic status and age impact childhood fears.</p> <p>Methods/Materials I developed a fear survey that maintained the primary fear factors of the American Fear Survey Schedule for Children (FSSC-AM), yet had sixty less items. I chose thirty-eight common childhood fears that I thought related to a child's SES and age, and thus created my survey. The shorter survey was designed to hold the student's attention better and be more acceptable to administrators and teachers. I surveyed fifth, sixth and eighth grade students from an Independent Private School (High SES) and fifth graders from a 64% socioeconomically challenged Public School (Low SES). Data was analyzed using the Serial Attached SCSI (SAS) data analysis program. I performed a Principal Component Analysis to identify the various components, or factors, of fear measured by my fear survey and to group the data into related clusters to ease data interpretation. Multivariate Analyses of Variance, univariate analyses variance and t-tests of the 38 items of my fear survey, three principal fear factors and total fear score were conducted in a 2 (SES) X 3 (Grade) design.</p> <p>Results Low SES fifth graders' fears clustered around more common and less physically threatening scenarios, while high SES students' fears focused on threats to self-concept, social anxieties and peer acceptance. The main effects of age and socioeconomic status for the fear survey results was significant, as well as the interaction of age and socioeconomic status. Sixth graders displayed the highest total number of fears and eighth graders the lowest total number of fears. Low SES fifth graders reported a significantly greater total number of fears than high SES fifth graders.</p> <p>Conclusions/Discussion The students' top three fears were of violence. Perhaps this is a reflection on the rapidly increasing world violence. In the past decade numerous terrorist attacks worldwide occurred. More recently, there have been frequent random acts of violence, some at schools. Students' fear response to violence, along with individual differences in fear due to rapid developmental changes and socioeconomic status are important factors for government leaders, schools, and parents to consider.</p>	
Summary Statement This project examines the impacts of age and socioeconomic status on childhood fears.	
Help Received Dr. Vincent Alfait served as my mentor.	