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Maths anxiety in primary and secondary school students: gender differences, developmental changes and anxiety specificity.

Summary: Maths anxiety (MA) is a debilitating negative emotional reaction towards mathematics. However, MA research in primary and early secondary school is surprisingly sparse and inconsistent. Here we tested primary and secondary students’ maths and reading performance and their maths and general anxiety (GA). We examined gender differences, developmental changes regarding the MA/maths performance link and investigated whether MA is linked to other academic domains (reading) and/or to other anxiety-types (GA). Results revealed that girls exhibited higher MA than boys at both educational levels. Whilst there was a reliable negative correlation between MA and secondary students’ arithmetic performance, no such relationship was revealed in primary students. Finally, MA was moderately correlated with GA and, when GA was partialled out, MA remained significantly correlated with secondary students’ arithmetic performance. MA was not related to reading performance when GA was controlled. It was concluded that the negative MA/maths performance link surfaces later in the educational timeline and MA appears to be both exclusively related to maths and independent of GA.

Classification: C20 C60 C30
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