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Attitude towards fears

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Abstract

Fear is quite a prevailing factor in not just youngsters but elders as well. It causes impairment in one's daily functioning and may also affect their confidence and self-image. Hence, this study aims to investigate the attitudes of people of varying age groups towards their fear(s), to determine whether there is a gender difference in the attitudes of people towards their fear(s) and to examine the impact of people's fear(s) on their daily lives. The study was conducted on 400 people of which 200 were females and 200 were males of varying age groups between 15 to 55 years (Average age of males: 25 years and average females: 20 years with a total mean of 23) from Chennai. A self-developed questionnaire consisting of 17 items was used to measure attitudes towards fear. Participants were invited to participate in an online survey via GoogleForms™ that was distributed through social media platforms such as WhatsApp™, Facebook™, Twitter™ and Amino™. Descriptive analysis and percentage analysis were completed for comparison and to observe the general trends as indicated by the collected data. From the results, it was found that the impact, fear has on individuals is negative in both males and females but the intensity of the impact of fear was higher in females than males. It was also found that females had a more positive attitude towards their fears than males did.

Keywords: fear, psychological impact, life, attitudes

Introduction

Fear is a typical response that one experiences, towards physical and emotional dangers that come their way. The response one feels, prepares them to either take "flight" or "fight" the sensation, danger, trauma, etc. that causes fear. If one doesn't feel fear ever, it's difficult to help protect oneself or others from legitimate threats. Trauma also inflicts fear in people. Fear causes a release of adrenaline rush through the body that heightens the senses and gives energy to the muscles so that the person can react efficiently to the immediate event or situation, come what may be. In recent times, most people have been startled by something or the other— unexpected and sudden, leading to experiencing the adrenaline surge that goes with it. However, there has been prevailing fears like the fear of death, fear of losing someone, etc. that have been around for a very long time. Fears are less pronounced than phobias are and more common among people. Trembling, sweating, quick heartbeats, a sensation of choking, chest pains and tightness are some symptoms or indicators that one is experiencing fear. Dry mouth also occurs when a person is afraid. The manifestation of fear may also be caused by worry, anxiety or stress in one's life.

Repeated exposure to situations leads to familiarity, confidence, and boldness. This greatly reduces both the fear response and exhilaration, resulting in a sense of comfort or indifference towards that situation. It also forms the foundations of some phobia treatments, which depend on slowly minimizing the fear response by making it feel familiar and common.

When a fear is continuous, repeating or has a negative impact on one's daily functioning, one must check with a therapist or any other mental-health professional. The emotional responses to fears are highly personalized and unique. For instance, some people are thrill or sensation seekers, thriving on extreme sports and other fear and situations. Others have a negative reaction to the feeling of fear where they avoid fear-inducing situations regardless of any cost. Although the physical reaction may be the same, fear may itself be perceived as either positive or negative; accordingly, causing an impact on the individual's life.

Review of literature

- Davidson *et al.* (1989) [7] carried out a study to evaluate how gender, grade/class, and their socio-economic background (rural/urban) differences affect the content and intensity of self-reported fears of 650 boys and girls altogether, of Classes IV, V and VI. From the results, it was found that girls were more fearful than boys, rural children were more fearful than urban children, and children of classes IV and V were more scared than children of class VI. These differences were seen as the consequence of greater intensity of fears; while the content of fears appeared to be relatively comparable across all groups.
 - Gullone, and King (1997) conducted a three-year follow-up of normal fears in 273 children and adolescents of 7 to 18 years of age. The results showed that there was a general decrease in fearfulness between the initial and the follow-up assessment for 7 to 10 year olds. However for 11 year olds, a degree of stability for all fears, with the exception of psychic stress-related fears was witnessed. In contrast, older children reported having fewer fears and had a lower intensity of fearfulness than younger children. Similarly, boys reported lesser fears and lower intensity than girls. The most common fears related to death and danger were relatively stable over time.
- Laporte *et al.* (2017) [14] investigated specific and social fears in 2,512 children and adolescents from a large community in the High Risk Study for Psychiatric Disorders in order to separate normative fears from problem indicators and phobias. The results showed that social fears are more likely to indicate problems and phobias than specific fears and that most specific fears were normative when mild; all specific fears indicate problems when pervasive. Among social fears, those not restricted to performance and fear of writing in front of others indicate problems when mild. All social fears indicate problems and are highly indicative of social phobia when pervasive.

Objectives

The objectives of the study were:

- To determine whether there is a gender difference in the attitudes of people towards their fear(s).
- To examine the impact of people's fear(s) on their daily lives.

Methodology

The methodology adopted was descriptive survey method.

Sample

Convenience sampling and snow ball sampling was used for the study. The sample consisted of 400 people of which 200 were females and 200 were males of varying age groups between 15 to 55 years (Average age of males: 25 years and average females: 20 years with a total mean of 23) from Chennai.

Tools used

A self-developed questionnaire consisting of 17 items to measure attitudes towards fear, with multiple response options, was developed by the authors.

Data collection

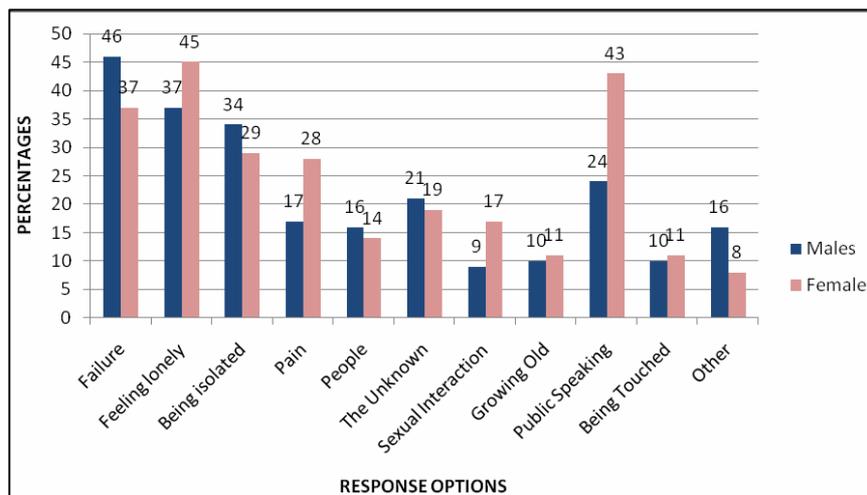
Participants were invited to participate in an online survey via GoogleForms™ that was distributed through social media platforms such as WhatsApp™, Facebook™, Twitter™ and Amino™.

Statistics used

Descriptive analysis and percentage analysis were completed for comparison and to observe the general trends as indicated by the collected data.

Results and interpretations

I fear

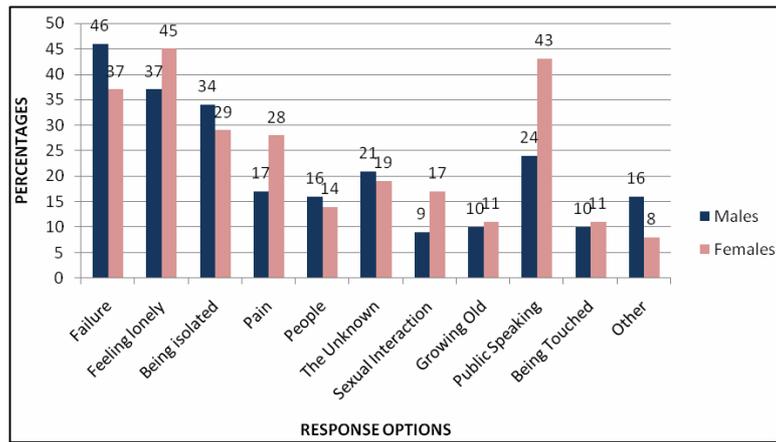


Interpretation

From the graph, comparing males and females it is seen that in males the predominant fear is the fear of heights (38%) followed by fear of insects (21%) and fear of other matters (18%) like getting into an accident, exams, loss of a loved one, God, fast-moving objects, etc. It is evident that males fear crowds (9%) the least and heights the most.

In females, the predominant fear is the fear of insects (33%) followed by fear of other matters (30%) such as darkness, patterns, death, God, fast-moving objects, etc., and fear of heights and animals (both, 28%). It is observed that females fear flying. (8%) the least and, insects the most.

I fear



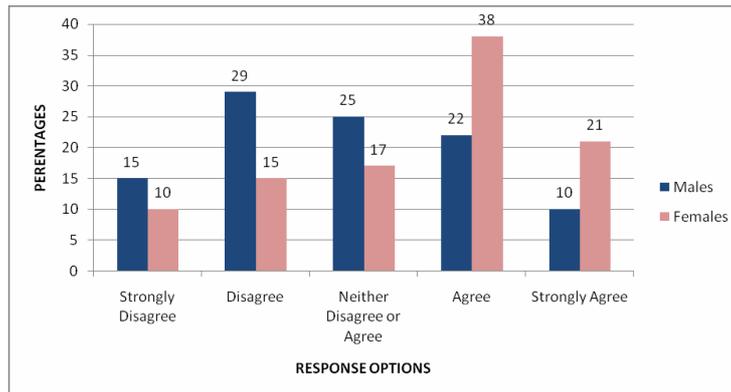
Interpretation

From the graph, comparing males and females it is evident that in males the predominant fear is the fear of failure (46%) followed by fear of feeling lonely (37%) and fear of being isolated (34%), respectively. The fear found least prevailing amongst the males was the fear of sexual interaction (9%) while the fear most prevalent was the fear of failures.

In females, the predominant fear is the fear of feeling lonely (45%) followed by fear of public speaking (43%) and fear

of failure (37%), respectively. The fear found least prevailing amongst the females was the fear of other general matters (8%) such as fear of not being able to fit in, losing your loved one, not being good enough, getting one’s heartbroken, etc., while the fear most prevalent was the fear of feeling lonely.

I am open to discussions about my fear(s).

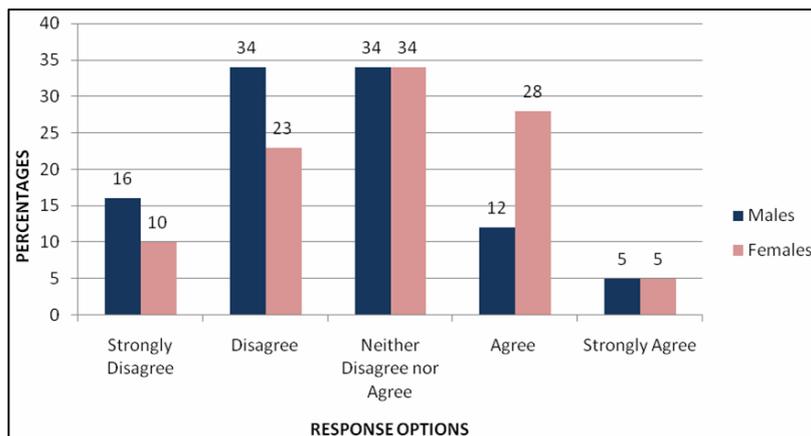


Interpretation

From the graph, comparing males and females it is evident that quite a few females (21%) strongly agreed and less than half (38%) agreed that they are more open to discussions about their fear(s). However in males, few (10%) strongly agreed and few (22%) agreed being open about fear while, few (15%) strongly disagree and few

(29%) disagree being open to discussing their fears(s). This may be due to the stereotypical belief that it is not ‘macho’ or ‘manly’ to talk about feelings and share or admit to having fears.

I am usually pushed by my peers to face my fear(s) head on.

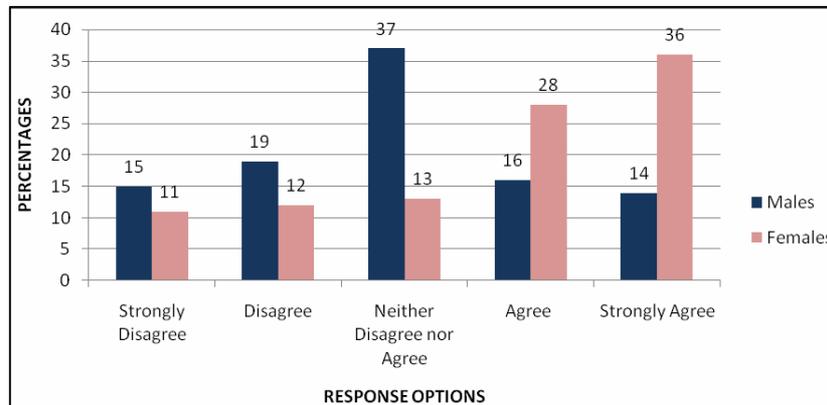


Interpretation

From the graph, it is seen that half (50%) of the male group deny being pushed by their peers to face their fear(s) head on, under which few (16%) strongly disagreed and less than half (34%) disagreed being pushed around. But amongst females, only few (10%) strongly disagreed and a few

(23%), disagreed to the same. This may be, because in the current society males are expected to not have any fear or obliged to not show it if they did have any.

I have someone that I can share my fear(s) with.

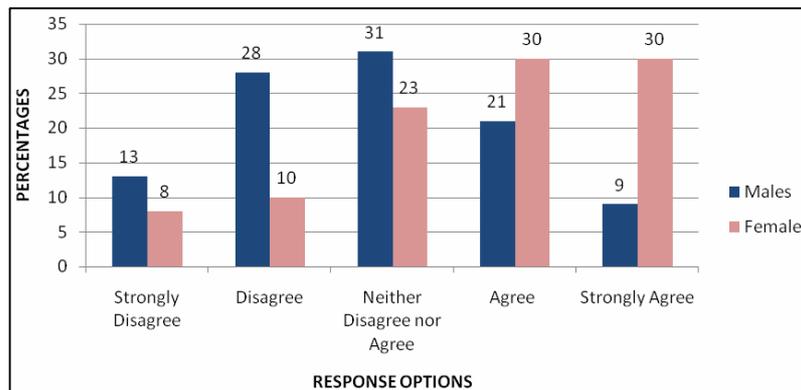


Interpretation

From the graph, it is seen that the majority of females have someone that they can share their fear(s) with, where less than half (36%) of them strongly agreed and few (28%) agreed having a confidant. Whereas, a very limited number of males didn't feel the same – few (14%) strongly agreed and a few (16%) agreed having someone to share their fear(s) with. This could be because of the participants' unwillingness to share something personal like feelings,

fears, emotions, insecurities, etc. Feedback from the respondents implied that stereotypical perception of and about males plays a huge role in this unwillingness, as men worry about the judgment and questions others might raise about their 'manliness'.

6) I am more comfortable taking my own time getting over my fear(s) and insecurities.

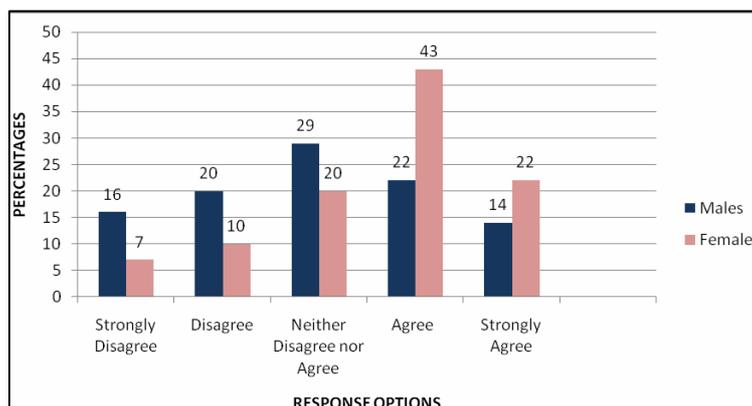


Interpretation

From the graph, it is seen that females more than males, are comfortable taking their own time getting over their fear(s) and insecurities; where amongst females, few (29%) strongly agreed and less than half (30%) agreed. Amongst

males, a small strength (9%) of them strongly agreed and few (21%) agreed that it's best for them to take their own time beating their fear(s).

I have tried getting over my fear(s) in the past.

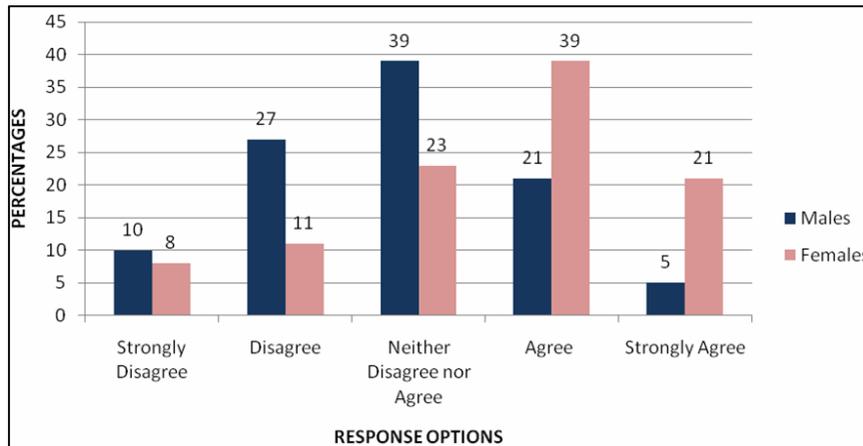


Interpretation

From the graph, it is seen that most of the females have tried getting over their fear(s) in the past of which a few (22%) strongly agreed and nearly half (43%) agreed having done so; whereas most males haven't tried to do get over

their fears in the past. This can be implied as how only a few (16%) of the males strongly agreed and few (20%) agreed to have tried to overcome their fear(s) in the past.

I am currently trying to get over my fear(s).

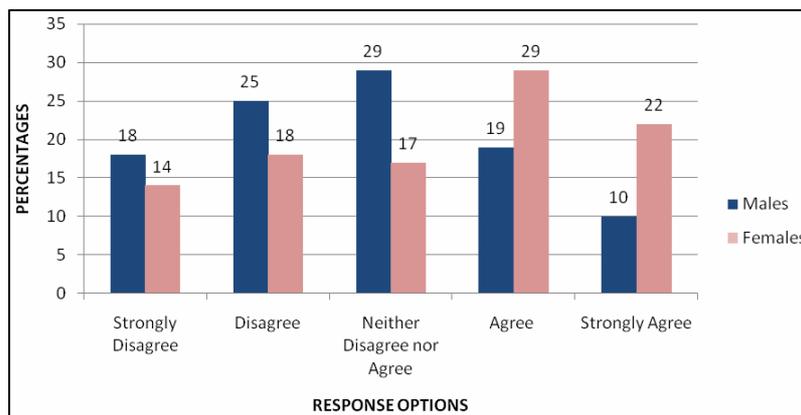


Interpretation

It is evident from the graph that majority of the females is currently trying to get over their fear, under which few (21%) strongly agreed and less than half (39%) females agreed currently doing so. While amongst males, only a small percentage (5%) strongly agreed and few (21%) of

them agreed to, currently, trying to get over their fear(s). The males seem uninterested and seem to have not given a thought about it before or have other reasons to not do so.

My fear(s) has prevented me from doing things I like or want to do.

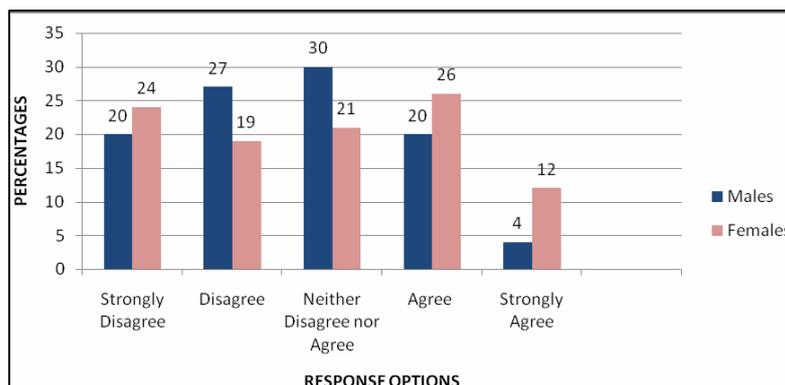


Interpretation

From the graph, it can be seen that for the majority of the female participants, their fear(s) has prevented them from doing things they like. Few (22%) females strongly agreed and less than half (39%) of females agreed that their fear(s) causes some kind of impact on what they like doing, that is a lot more compared to that in males in which only a

minimal amount (10%) strongly agreed and few (19%) agreed that their fear(s) prevent them from enjoying what they want or like to do

I can do nothing about my fear(s) and must just live with it.

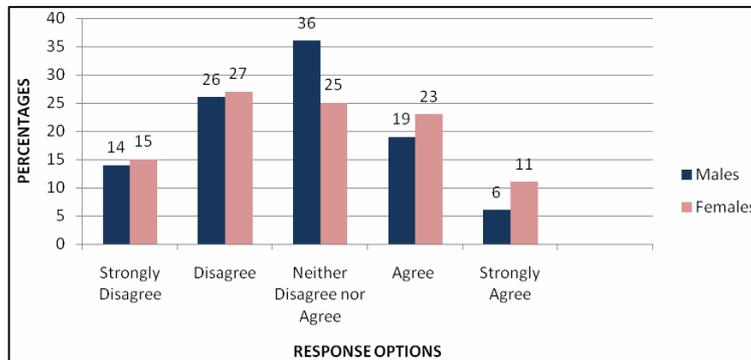


Interpretation

From the graph, it is seen that majority of females disclaim that they can do nothing about their fear(s) and must live with it. Less than half (37%) of females strongly disagreed and few (25%) disagreed; while among males, few (21%) strongly disagreed and few (28%) disagreed that they can

do nothing about their fears. This shows that majority of the females believe that they have the power to alter their fear into their strength or get over it.

I have better things to do and focus on rather than overcoming my fear(s).

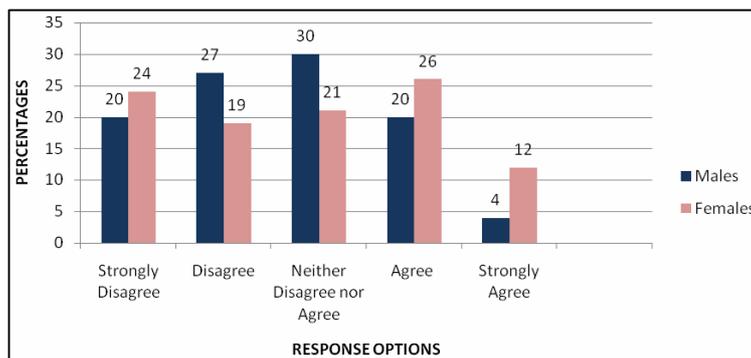


Interpretation

It is evident from the graph, that most females and males deny having better things to do and focus on rather than overcoming their fear(s) where among the females, quite a few (14%) strongly disagreed and few (26%) disagreed and in males, few (15%) strongly disagreed and few (27%) disagreed

having better things to focus on than their fears. This shows that people believe they have the power to control their fear as well as prioritize getting over fear(s).

My fear(s) stops me from making closer inter-personal bonds with people.

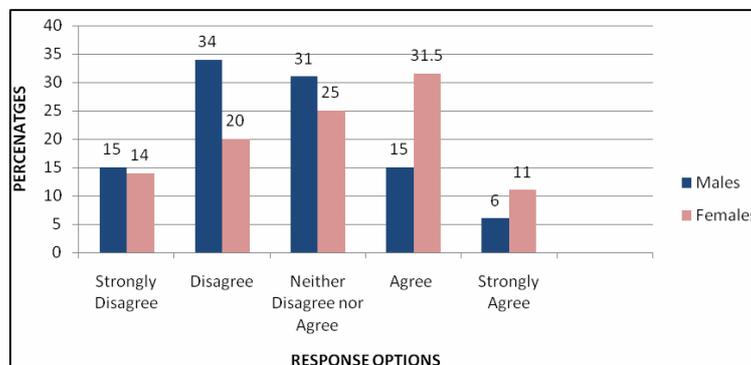


Interpretation

From the graph, it is seen that majority of the males rejected the idea that their fear(s) stops them from making closer inter-personal bonds with people whereas many females seem to have accepted it. Among females, quite a less amount (8%) strongly disagreed but less than half

(39%) disagreed. Among males, few (24%) strongly disagreed and few (19%) disagreed that their fear(s) affects their inter-personal relationships.

I tend to run away from the object(s) of my fear(s).

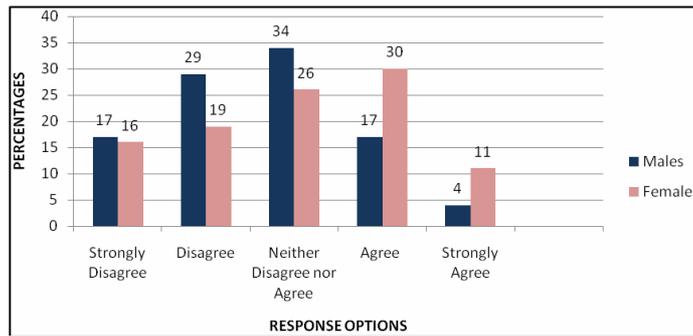


Interpretation

It is seen from the graph that most males tend not to run away from the object(s) of their fear(s) as much as females do. Among males, few (15%) strongly disagreed and less than half (34%) disagreed running from their object(s) of

fear(s), whereas amongst females, few (14%) strongly disagreed and few (20%) disagreed that they tend to run away from their object(s) of fear(s). Males instead prefer facing it head on or simply believe they possess less fear.

I avoid anything that makes me remember my fear(s).

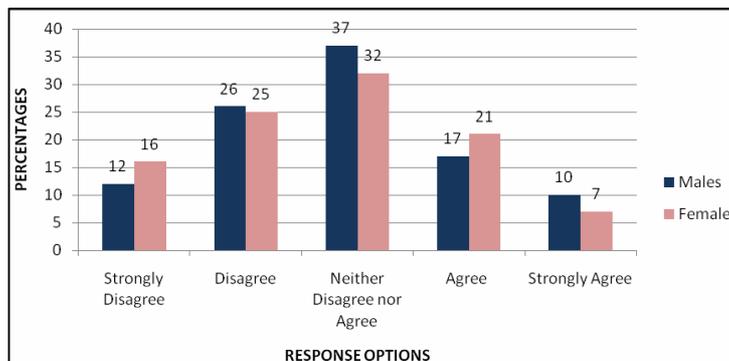


Interpretation

From the graph, it is seen that more males don't avoid things that remind them of their fear(s) than females. Few (17%) males strongly disagreed and few (29%) disagreed that they avoid anything that makes them remember their fear(s). Amongst females, few (16%) strongly disagreed and few (19%) disagreed with the same. The majority that accepted the statement are females of which, few (11%)

strongly agreed and less than half (30%) agreed to it. This indicated that just avoiding the feared item isn't enough for them but, they preferred avoiding the very thought of it as well.

I tend to fight my fear(s) only so that others can stop nagging me about it.

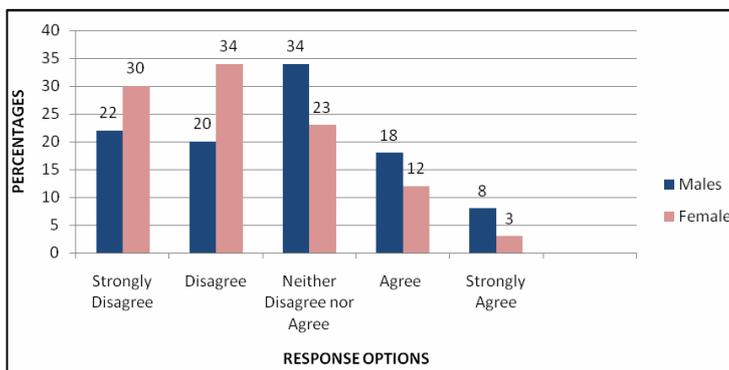


Interpretation

From the graph, it is evident that, on comparing males and females, most males don't fight their fear(s) just so that others can stop nagging them about it but may do so out of their own will. few (12%) of the males strongly disagreed and few (26%) disagree that they face fears just to silence

the nagging of others. Few (16%) females strongly disagreed and few (25%) disagreed that they face fears just to quieten the nagging.

It is not necessary to get over fear(s).

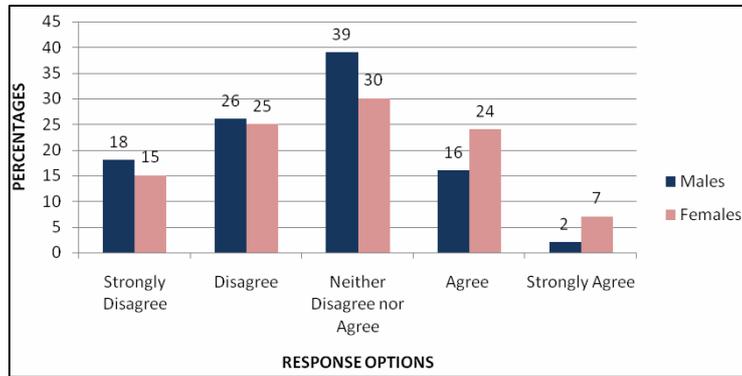


Interpretation

The graph shows that the majority of the females think that it is more necessary to get over fear(s) than males do. Less than half (30%) of the females strongly disagreed and less than half (34%) disagreed that getting over fear is

unimportant, while few (22%) of the males strongly disagreed and few (20%) of them disagreed to the same.

I feel overshadowed and vulnerable because of my fear(s).



Interpretation

From the graph, it is seen that majority of the males don't feel overshadowed and vulnerable due of their fear(s) in which few (18%) strongly disagreed and few (26%) disagreed feeling overshadowed and vulnerable due to their fears as much as females did, amongst whom few (15%) strongly disagreed and few (25%) disagreed feeling overshadowed and vulnerable due to their fears. This may again be due to the 'macho' stereotype.

Conclusions

The results of the survey show that, the impact, fear has on individuals is negative in both males and females. The attitudes of males and females towards Fear, however, differ in various aspects. In many of the cases, from the responses received, it is evident that despite being the gender that is affected most negatively by their fears, females are the ones that have a positive attitude towards fear with the implication that they believe they have the power to alter their fear(s) into strength and that they don't have to just deal with it lifelong. Hence, they are seen to be actively trying to overcome their fears and feel comfortable sharing and talking about their fear(s) to their confidant(s). On the other hand, it is seen that the 'macho' stereotype interfered with the fearfulness in males, making them more hesitant to admit having fears or talk about their feelings and emotions. They worry about the questions that may be raised by others and hence don't have a confidant to share about things that frighten them. Males, from the data, are seen taking bare minimum effort in trying to overcome their fear(s) and are usually indifferent in their attitudes towards it. As their fear(s) seems to be having a lesser negative impact on the males, it is clearly evident that males can continue doing things they like or want, without having to avoid their object(s) of fear(s) or compromise on their interpersonal bonds.

Implications

It is evident that both females and males require help and therapy to get over their fear(s) if it hinders their daily functioning. Hence, this emphasizes that it is fitting to use methods like exposure therapy, relaxation and breathing exercises under the guidance of a therapist.

Limitations

- i. Age may have played a role in the results obtained. With mean ages being 20 for females and 25 for males and total mean age being 23 years, there may be a possibility that the subjects haven't got to experience many fear(s) yet or the chance to self-introspect on it.

- ii. Men are prone to look up to the society's views and are conscious about judgment about their 'manliness', hence hesitant to admit to having any fear.
- iii. Subjects targeted were limited to only Chennai, TN.

Suggestions

- i. A larger sample ($N > 400$) is recommended to examine attitudes towards fears to get the perfect replication of the population being studied.
- ii. Expand the targeted age groups as well as geographical area when selecting samples.
- iii. More specific questions and a longer list of fear inventory can be provided.

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