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EARLY LEARNING EXPERIENCE AND ADOLESCENT ANXIETY: A CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON BETWEEN JAPAN AND ENGLAND

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Anxiety disorders are among the most common psychiatric conditions in children and adolescents.

One of the most consistent findings across studies is that anxiety disorders tend to run in families.

While these high prevalence rates suggest that anxiety may be "transmitted" within the family, the

exact mechanism involved in this transmission is still unclear. An area that has been suggested in the

transmission of anxiety from parents to children is the role of learning experiences (i.e., through

modeling and information transfer). While these studies have enhanced our knowledge on the

association between learning experience and anxiety symptoms, it is not known whether these

findings which were based on studies conducted in Western culture could be replicated in Eastern

culture.

The present study compared the frequency of anxiety symptoms among adolescents in Japan and England, and examined the association between early learning experiences and anxiety symptoms.

299 adolescents (147 from England and 152 from Japan) were investigated. Adolescents in England

reported significantly higher levels of anxiety symptoms than adolescents in Japan. No significant

differences emerged between the two countries for parent punishment/reinforcement of anxious

behavior. However, for non-anxiety symptoms, adolescents in England scored significantly higher in

parent punishment and the Japanese sample scored higher in parent reinforcement. Parent verbal

transmission about the danger of anxiety and cold symptoms was more common in Japan than in

England. The impact of learning experience on adolescent's anxiety seemed to differ across cultures,

which underscore the importance of cultural factors on adolescent's anxiety.