

SUPERSTITIONS IN ADOLESCENCE

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Abstract: The study of superstitions was especially anthropological until 1950. Anthropologists have struggled to list superstitions around the world and tried to find the origin and to distinguish them from religion and science. A number of studies suggest that most people believe in the existence of at least one paranormal or combinations of several paranormal. In the last three decades, several major social trends have helped popularize several varieties of superstition and belief in the paranormal. Particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, but continuing to this day, the New Age movement has rejected modern science, technology and Orthodox religion, giving new life to old superstitions and introducing new ones. The authors present their results obtained after a research performed on a group of teenagers on superstitions

Key words: superstitions, teens, superstitious beliefs, superstitious rituals

Theoretical framework

Studies on superstition

The study of superstition was especially anthropological until 1950. Anthropologists have struggled to list superstitions around the world and tried to find the origin and to distinguish them from religion and science.

After Vyse (1997), the anthropologist and sociologist Gustav Jahoda proposed four categories of superstitions. The first classification of Jahoda was called: superstition as bifurcation of cosmology world. He believed that all religions must be included in superstitions and categorized separately.

Other social superstitions were sent to the second classification developed by Jahoda: the great majority of superstition come from the culture. These superstitions are separated from religious beliefs and usually centered around some important human events: birth, marriage, death etc. Experience with the occult side was the formation of a third category of superstitions: the paranormal experiences: alien abduction, communication with the dead, clairvoyance etc. Gustav Jahoda said that this kind of superstitions contradict our scientific understanding and because of this they should be placed in superstitions. Personal superstitions compose the last category of Jahoda (Jahoda, 1969).

It consists of a large group of beliefs and activities which are not cultural related in turn keeps from the individual: a person can establish that a particular piece of clothing can bring good luck if it is worn. This belief is not bound nor to culture, nor to religion but instead it is a personal conclusion of the individual.

Ethnomologists have made a more recent classification that divides superstitions in the following categories:

- Simple Superstitions
- Common Superstitions
- Sensory Superstitions

Huluta Carmen and Irina Nicolau (2000), make up a collection of Romanian beliefs and superstitions by Arthur Gorovei and Gh. F. Ciuşanu. They opt to systematize beliefs and superstitions selected for cataloging depending on keywords in the proposed sequences, presentation being made in alphabetical order being more appropriate for the reader.

Ioan Dupu (1999), makes up a collection of Romanian superstitions and try to annex their explanation extracted from old habits and beliefs: avoid unlucky numbers; birds cry is heeded and interpreted as a portent, if for example, play a crow, cuckoo or owl; call luck by hiding in the house of bread and salt, wood or money after the stove; forebodings when black cats cross the street; witchcraft and possession of any books of magic, occult writings, astrological calendars etc; mysterious occult Freemasonry, black and white magic, trick; astrology, horoscopes drawing or reading newspapers or magazines, reading the stars; witchcraft books; books interpreting dreams and future dreams; guessing games divination, witchcraft palm (palm lines interpretation); Spiritualism (Question dead), even visiting such meetings or allowing such practices in his house is enough to get under a heavy satanic connection.

It seems that belief in superstition is "alive" since the early twentieth century. These superstitions of all kinds are encouraged by the social environment rich in faithful.

Since the first studies, magic and religion were intertwined. A shaman is a spiritual leader but can sometimes bring rain when is needed. The priests of ancient Egypt used magic to inspire faith to masses. They made the statue cry, the lamps to burn constantly in the tombs of holy men.

Anthropological studies have provided an excellent starting point for investigating superstitions. Frazer wrote about the variety of magical beliefs. Durkheim placed the superstitions in the context of social. Malinowski's theory brings a vision of psychologically motivating superstition and magic as reducing anxiety, anxiety caused by conditions of risk and uncertainty (Vyse, 1997).

Epstein (1994) tells us that of all researches that aimed to study the psychology of superstition, two present direct and open observation, in the natural environment of the individual: Roger Boiser to determine the relationship between conservatism and common superstitions behavior propped a tall timber ladder near the wall in the middle of a busy street. Before being started to collect data, Boiser observed behavior of pedestrians and adjusted placing the ladder in the middle of the sidewalk. Those who avoided pass under the scale were considered superstitious, besides those who went on the scale that were considered unsuperstitious. Of course, some individuals who avoided pass under the scale did so for other reasons, not because they are superstitious; and those who went on the scale, could do it for other reasons.

However, Boiser was convinced that his experiment managed to separate superstitious pedestrians from skeptics. Once you have passed the "test scale", pedestrians were stopped and asked to complete a questionnaire which included a test of conservatism. The questionnaire was completed by 108 pedestrians (50 superstitious and 58 unsuperstitious). Boiser found differences in conservatism, but only on certain age groups. Pedestrians under forty, either superstitious or skeptical, have shown the same degree of conservatism. In older age, they were superstitious with a high degree of conservatism. Boiser suggested that conservative individuals may generally be more cautious. This precaution may lead to avoid passing below the ladder.

Glenn Wilson (1989) explains superstition as being motivated by the threat of anxious experiences in the face of uncertainty, the unknown. Fear is the motivating emotion regarding the superstition. Wilson says that superstition fear-based has source in the uncertainty of the unknown. "Today it is clear that not all superstitions are driven by fear". For

example, books superstitions players are motivated, faster hopes of winning than the fear of losing.

„But some superstitions, such taboo against going under a ladder is really motivated by the desire to avoid a disastrous end" (Vyse, 1997, pp. 49).

Tobacyk and Schrader (1991) suggest that the fear of death can be a motivation for the belief in the paranormal. Tobacyk's results were remarkably accurate. In two studies on students, he found that treating the death was positively correlated with the traditional religious beliefs, but uncorrelated with the paranormal tradition.

Emotional death concern was related to the belief in the paranormal and superstitious, but unrelated to traditional religious faith. Tobacyk offered the following interpretation of the link between treating death and traditional religious beliefs: "It seems that traditional religious faith prevented individuals to faster interpret the death as a personal reality and so do not feel so threatened by it".

A number of studies suggest that most people believe in the existence of at least one paranormal phenomenon or a combination of several paranormal phenomena.

Messer and Griggs (1989, apud Martin, 2007) found that over 99% of the 176 students participating in a study expressed the belief in at least one paranormal experience of the 10 submitted.

Gallup and Newport (1991) found that 7% of Americans do not believe in any of the 18 paranormal experiences described in a questionnaire. But the rest believe in at least one description.

In the last three decades, several major social trends have helped the popularization of several varieties of superstition and believes in paranormal. Particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, but continuing to this days, the New Age movement has rejected modern science, technology and Orthodox religion, giving a new life to the old superstitions and introducing new ones (Gavrila, 2010).

Studies on the difference between age and superstition

Many studies on the difference in age have shown that the older people are more skeptical than younger people, but others have shown the opposite.

Seymour Epstein (1994) conducted a study on three groups: children (9-12ani), students (18-22 years) and adults (27-65 years). They were interviewed about their faith in a few superstitions and believes in the the paranormal. Some of the superstitions used by Epstein in his study showed little variation across age groups studied. Taken as a whole, the relationship between age and superstition seems to be complicated.

"It is safer at this point, saying that no general statement can be made regarding the relationship between age and belief in superstition." (Epstein, pag. 709-710)

Studies on the relationship between sex and superstition

Epstein (1994) states that the attempts to discover differences regarding gender and superstition were more in touch with, and a large number of studies have shown that women are more superstitious than men.

Stuart Lucille Blum (1974, apud Styers, 2004) found that women are significantly more superstitious than men. The study was done on a population sample in New York consisting of 132 men and women. The study revealed that the most common superstitions were: avoiding walking under the ladder and knock on wood. This was contradicted by a study organized and led by Tobacyk and Milford in 1988.

Randal and Desrosiers (1980, apud Park, 2008) found a significant difference in the average scores for men and women in terms of the supernatural.

Thalbourne (1981) found no significant difference with regard to sex, in the case of belief in paranormal phenomena.

Tobacyk Jerome and Gary Milford (1983, apud Broks, 2006) made a questionnaire to estimate belief in the paranormal. They shared this belief into seven independent dimensions: traditional religious faith, witchcraft, superstition, spiritual, extraordinary life forms (fantastic) and precognition. The questionnaire made by Tobacyk and Milford is now known as "The Paranormal Belief Scale". They found that belief in the paranormal appears to have implications for the functioning of the human personality, especially with regard to locus of control, threat of death, our own concept, how to make inferences, dogmatism and irrational believes. The most significant finding of this research is that instead of being one single dimension of personality of the type "belief in the paranormal", there are more dimensions of the belief in paranormal, relatively independent, each having different effects on personality.

Haraldsson (1985, apud Klein, 1999) says that there are widespread beliefs in the paranormal women. The study was conducted on a representative sample, representing the adult population in the UK. Then there were two studies of the same manner except that the sample was chosen in Sweden. Further, Haraldsson has shown a significant correlation between female gender and belief in the paranormal in two studies made on samples drawn from Ireland ($r_{568} = .22$, $r_{196} = .30$) but not significant correlation ($R_{180} = .12$) in another in a study done on a sample from Ireland.

Tobacyk Jerome and Gary Milford (1988, apud Zusne & Jones, 1989) have carried out the study that found no significant differences in certain forms of superstition found among female students, namely those related to precognition (the ability to predict the future). To the male students, there were significant differences from the female in terms of belief in the extraordinary life forms (Bigfoot, the Loch Ness monster etc).

Tobacyk and Tobacyk (1992, apud Broks,2006) found that women believe more strongly in the paranormal than men in three different questionnaires related to belief in the paranormal and applied to some samples of the population.

Shermer (2002) mentions two other studies done on this subject.

Pamela L. Blizzard (1997, apud Broks,2006) conducted a survey to reveal the existence of any differences between male and female regarding parapsychological phenomena faith in. The sample was composed of 23 subjects (17 females and 6 males). Following the questionnaire showed that no significant differences between male and female regarding belief in paranormal phenomena in only two of the nine questions: precognition and own opinion of these phenomena.

"There is a similar difference by sex of the participant in the statement" Women are inferior to men in terms of intelligence. "This, no. nine statement appears in the bottom of the list - only 16% of men and 5.7% of women have marked it as true. Another statement which claims the difference between the sexes - "Women are by nature purer and better than men" - has been marked as true by 53% of women and 38% of men, but that does not change the fact that in general women have chosen several allegations as true. I could not find any explanation that more women than men checked as untrue allegations about faith healing and the brilliant people who were weak-minded like children" (Gustav Jahoda, 1969).

Except for some specific beliefs (extraordinary lifeforms, fantastic animals like the Loch Ness monster or alien visitors), in general, women are more superstitious than men.

Research

Hypotheses

H1. There is a positive correlation between the level of superstition and the time accorded to superstitious ritual fulfillment

H2. Female subjects give more time to fulfill superstitious rituals than males.

H3. Students in class-XII are less superstitious than those of class-IX from music profile.

H4. The subjects having as characteristic of personality the external locus are more superstitious than those with internal locus.

H.5. Superstitions related to tests / exams are the most common in student life.

Sample

Given the limitations of this study were selected a total of 50 subjects - students of the School of Arts "Sabin Dragoi" Arad using simple random sampling method. Selected number of 50 subjects, equally divided on the profile of music (25 students of class-IX and 25 students of class-XII) and gender (25 women and 25 men in each class).

Methodology

We used in our research the Questionnaire "locus of control" Rotter and the Superstition questionnaire and superstitious ritual (CSRs)

Results

1. Superstitious beliefs

Presentation common in the groups studied. The superstitious believes most commonly found in the investigated subjects are:

Table 1.
The most frequent superstitious believes

Statement	True/Number of subjects
VIII.1: Finding a 4 leaf clover is a sign of luck	6
XIV.1: Is a sign of lucky to meet a chimney sweep	18
VIII.2: Basil protects of evil thoughts and spirits	11
IV.3.: A wish made at midnight New Year is likely to be fulfilled	27
IV.5. It's bad luck to enter the new year without a penny in his pocket	31

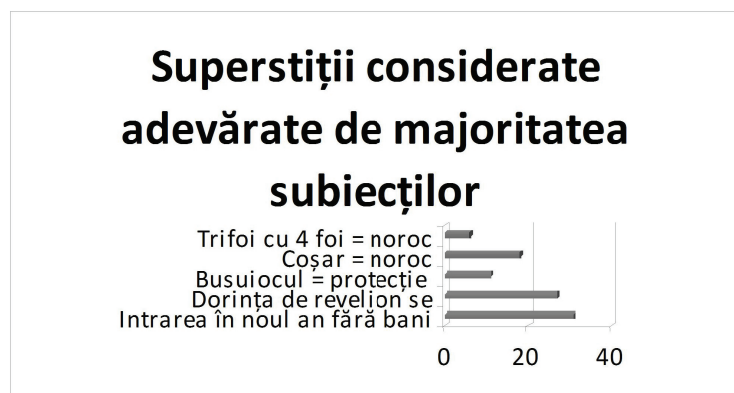


Figure 1. Superstitions considered as true by the majority of the subjects

2. The superstitious beliefs that most of the investigated subjects do not considered true:

Table 2
Superstitious believes that are considered not true by the majority of the subjects

Statement	Number of subjects
VII.2. If you're wearing the right foot left shoe or reverse bring bad luck	48
II.1. Who is swept by mistake will not marry	46
II.2. One who is seated at a corner table will not marry	48
VII.5: Peppermint placed under the pillow during sleep induces dream messages that give answers about the future	50
VI.3. It's bad luck to cut the bread on both sides once	45
VI.4. It's bad luck if a slice of bread smeared with butter falls down with the butter on the ground	47

The statement to which most subjects stated that "ther are not sure" if it is true or false is "a serene Christmas announces a fruitful year".

The category that includes most positive answers is related to superstitions related to plants (32 positive responses) followed by that related superstitions related to objects (29 positive responses) and on the human body (23 positive replies).

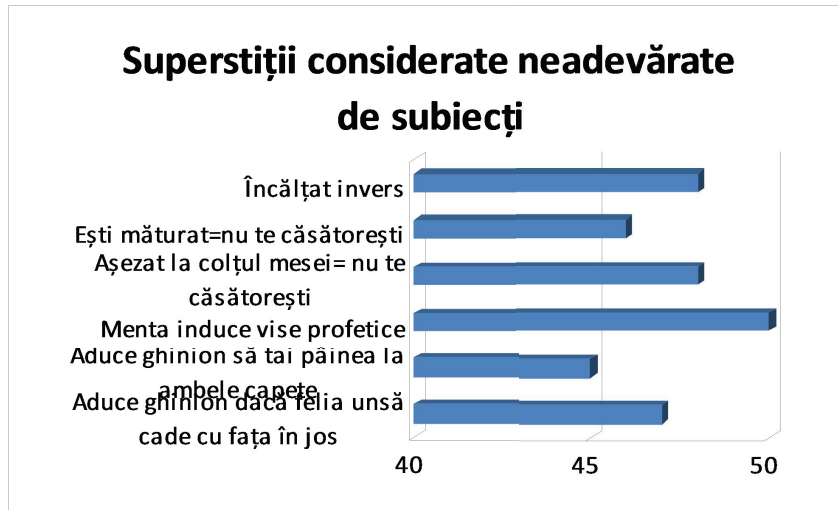


Figure 2. Superstitions considered as being not true

3. It is interesting to note that there is a link between faith related to the influence of planets on human character and the belief in the fact that people were created equally in terms of the ability to achieve something ($R = 0.307$, $p < 0.01$)

Table 3
Relation between the belief in the planets influence and the belief in the equal capacity of the men in achieving something

People born under the influence of planets shows this influence in their character	All men are created equally in terms of the ability to achieve something	
	Fals	True
Fals	16	12
True	19	37

The statements seem contradictory at first glance, but it is possible that the meaning is rather that "every man is destined to achieve something, and is born under the influence of planets that indicates what he must achieve". In this sense, the subjects would indicate a strong belief in destiny.

The same strong correlation statistically significant ($R = 0.272$, $p < 0.001$) exists between disability, planets and performances:

Table 4.
**The relations between disability, planets
and performances**

People born under the influence of planets shows this influence in their character	No defect / disability of mind or body we can not refrain from anything if you have enough willpower	
	Fals	True
Fals	13	39
True	18	43

Also, as a person is superstitious (generally) the more it will give more importance to appearance of others, as indicated by the correlation between the total score (all categories) and the belief in the statement that "a high forehead indicates intellectual superiority "(R = 0.199, p <0.05) and the statement „certain lines in the palm of a people predict the future" (R = 0.339, p <0.01).

4 Statements considered true / false:

Table 5.
Assumptions considered false or true

Statement	Subjects that considered it	
	False	True
When someone sneezes say good luck	7	43
People born under the influence of planets shows this influence in their character	20	30
A high forehead indicates intellectual superiority	45	5
All men are created equally in terms of the ability to achieve something	12	38
Certain lines of a person's palm predict the future	38	12
No defect / disability of mind or body we can not refrain from anything if you have enough willpower	16	34

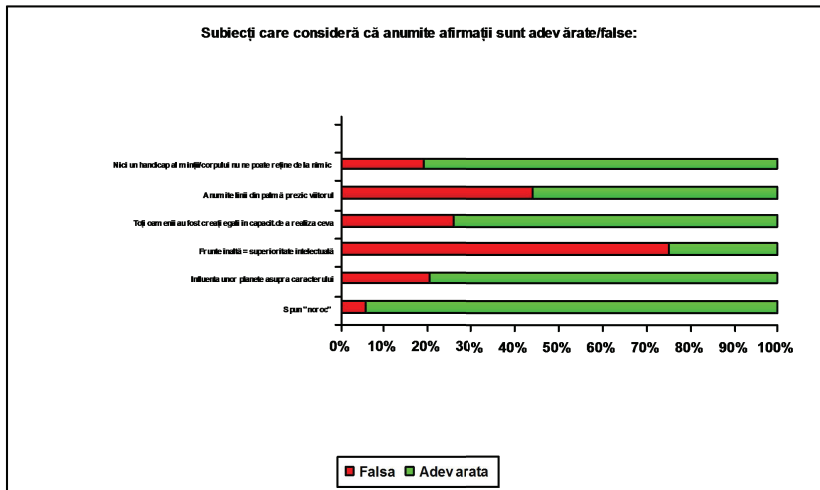


Figure 3. Assumptions considered false or true

H1. The Pearson Correlation Test showed the existence of statistically significant correlation between the total score in all categories and the time to perform rituals: the more a person is superstitious (overall) the more it will allow more time to perform rituals ($R = 0.280, p < 0.01$).

Applying the Pearson correlation test led to the determination that there are correlations statistically significant between total scores in all categories, indicating that the beliefs in superstitions is a general characteristic of a subject and not limited to a certain category of superstition: in other words, as a person is generally much superstitious, as the faith in superstitious will change his behavior.

The Pearson correlation test showed statistically significant correlations existing between:

Scorurile totale la categoria I și scorul total la întrebarea Q 2 (timpul acordat pentru efectuarea unui ritual): cu cât credințele superstițioase legate de timp ale unei persoane sunt mai puternice, cu atât ea va acorda mai mult timp efectuării ritualurilor superstițioase ($R = 0.265, p < 0.01$).

Scorurile totale la categoria IV (superstiții legate de sărbători) și timpul acordat pentru efectuarea unui ritual: cu cât credințele superstițioase legate de perioadele de sărbători ale unei persoane sunt mai puternice, cu atât ea va acorda mai mult timp efectuării ritualurilor magico-superstițioase ($R = 0.198, p < 0.05$).

Table 6
The superstitious rituals

Rituals performed for	Nr. subjects who declare they have fulfilled such rituals:
Attracting the luck	46
Removing bad luck	13
Success in an examination	24
Initiating a love relationship	9
I have not met any ritual	49

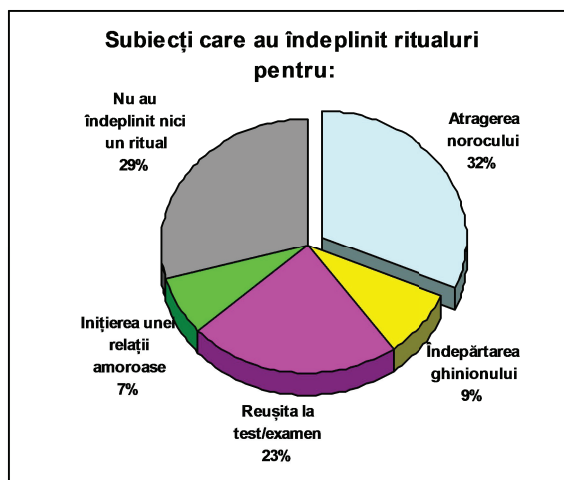


Figure 4. The superstitious rituals

H.2 Female subjects give more time to fulfill superstitious rituals than males. (Hypothesis 2).

Women were found to be more superstitious regarding superstitions related to animals (total score category IX: men = 8.3, female = 9.08, $p = 0.045$).

Women also tend to give more time to conduct rituals (the average time for fulfillment of rituals men tend to "under a minute" and women "between 1 minute and 5 minutes").

H.3 Students in class XII are less superstitious than those of class-IX from music profile. (Hypothesis 3)

Table 7
The difference between the two samples regarding the degree of superstition

Superstitions regarding:	Average total score / category for students in class:		Threshold of statistical significance (p) the average of differences	Significance of average difference
	Cl. a-XII-a	Cl. a-IX-a		
Time	7.88	9.40	0.00	s
Marriage	8.18	9.06	0.107	n.s.
Death	8.53	10.33	0.00	s
feasts	9.25	11.53	0.00	s
House	6.96	8.6	0.00	s
Food	7.28	8.5	0.002	s
Clothing	6.27	7.61	0.00	s
Plants	10.45	12.08	0.001	s
Animals	8.28	9.10	0.036	s
Objects	8.80	11.57	0.00	s.
Body	8.77	11.72	0.00	s.
Talismans	8.75	10.18	0.002	s
Exams	8.45	9.43	0.09	n.s.
miscellaneous	9.01	10.16	0.05	n.s.
Total score all cat.	116.88	139.3	0.00	s.

In total, the students from ninth grade turn out to be more superstitious than students in grade XII-profile music. The biggest differences relates to superstitions related to: death and funeral; holidays. The smallest differences are in terms of superstitions concerning marriage and examinations.

We can extrapolate, saying that students in twelfth grade gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena related to human thought and life cycle, helping to overcome superstitious magical concepts acquired through specific cultural education. On the other hand, in terms of life issues that have the greatest emotional impact in the current development cycle (those related to exams and marriage) students tend to give an increased attention to superstitions.

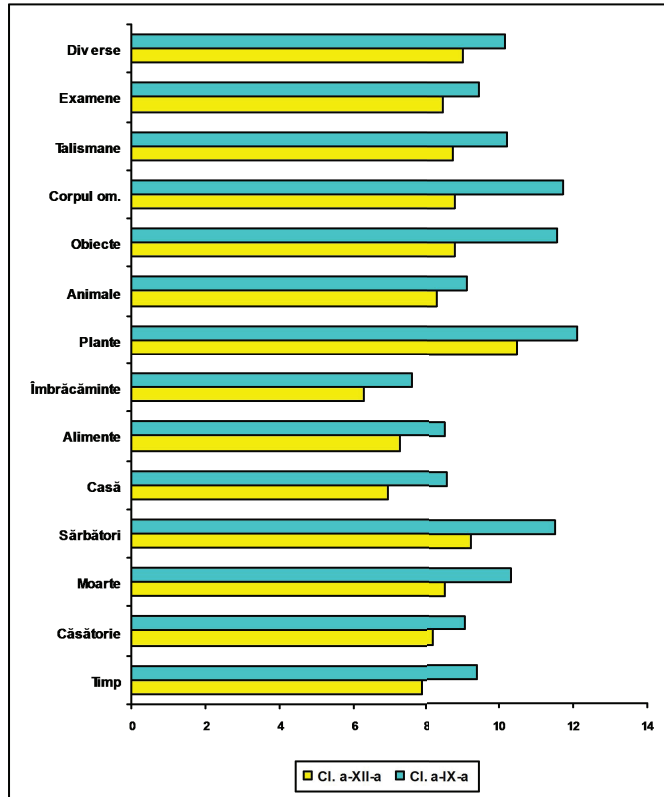


Figure 5. The difference between the two samples regarding the degree of superstition

H.4. The subjects having as characteristic of personality the external locus are more superstitious than those with internal locus

Table 8.
The difference between the subjects with internal locus of control and external locus of control

Superstitions regarding:	Average total score / category for students in class:		Threshold of statistical significance (p) the average of differences	Significance of average difference
	External	Internal		
Time	9.54	7.71	0.00	s
Marriage	9.54	7.67	0.00	s
Death	10.21	8.63	0.00	s
feasts	11.18	9.57	0.00	s

House	8.29	7.25	0.01	s
Food	8.83	6.91	0.00	s
Clothing	7.50	6.35	0.00	s
Plants	12.24	10.25	0.00	s
Animals	9.54	7.81	0.00	s
Objects	11.64	8.67	0.00	s
Body	11.55	8.88	0.00	s
Talismans	10.38	8.52	0.00	s.
Exams	9.91	7.93	0.00	s
miscellaneous	10.72	8.42	0.00	s
Total score all cat.	141.11	114.63	0.00	s

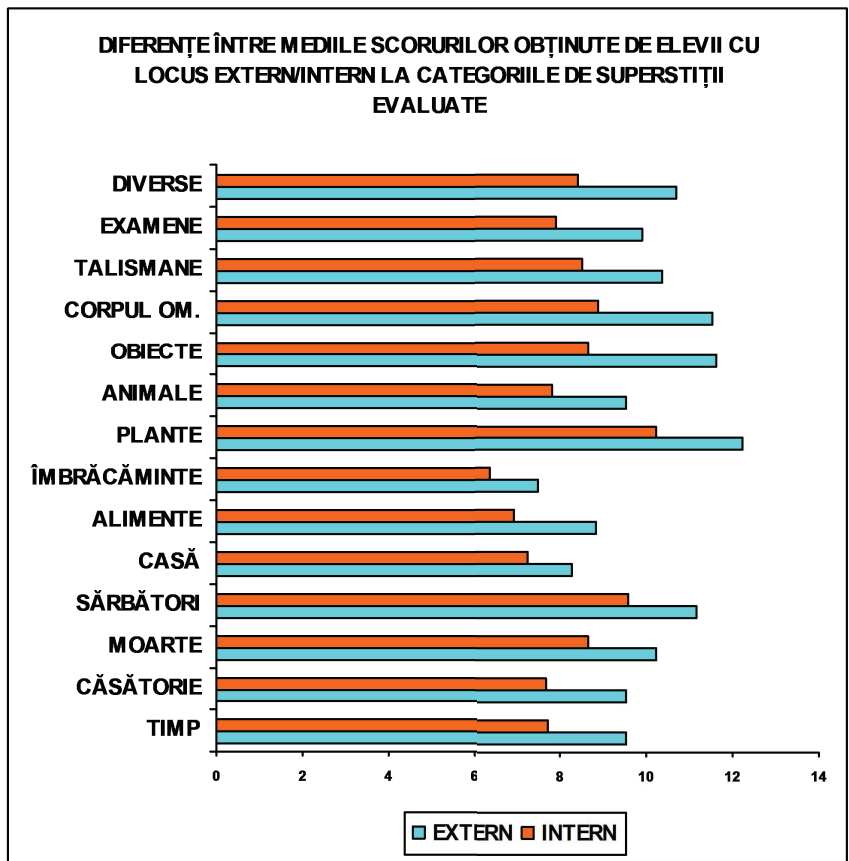


Figure 6. The difference between the subjects with internal locus of control and external locus of control

The subjects external locus of control (who believe that external forces are influencing / deciding the life and actions) are more

superstitious than those with internal locus, overall and in all categories separately. The biggest differences are registered at the superstitions regarding various issues (XIV) and those related to objects (X), while the lowest superstitions are related to home (V) and clothing (VII).

Also subjects with external locus devote significantly more time to perform rituals than those with internal locus (average time allocated for rituals by students with external locus tends toward "from one minute to five minutes" and over, and the students with internal locus to "under a minute").

H.5 Superstitions related to tests / exams are the most common in student life.

If we refer to the category that directly interest the subjects in the study (students) say that on superstitions related to tests / exams (XIII) (hypothesis 5), we note that:

Table 9.
Superstions related to exams

Superstions related to tests / exams	Subjects who consider that the affirmation is		
	False	Not sure	True
XIII1 Wearing a certain piece of clothing brings luck to test / exam	48	36	20
XIII2. It is luck if you dress your underwear inside out and wear it to the test / exam	41	37	17
XIII3. If you step with your right foot before you walk into the exam room you'll get lucky at that exam	47	29	27
XIII4. Bring good luck to the test / exam if you wear the lucky object	39	38	25
XIII5. You're lucky to test / exam if you sit in a certain place in a certain bank in classroom	49	35	21
Total XIII	224	175	110

The superstition for stepping with the right foot forward into the exam room is the most common, while the sit in a certain place is

considered false by most subjects. Overall, subjects turn out not to have too many superstitions related to tests / examinations, most statements being considered false.

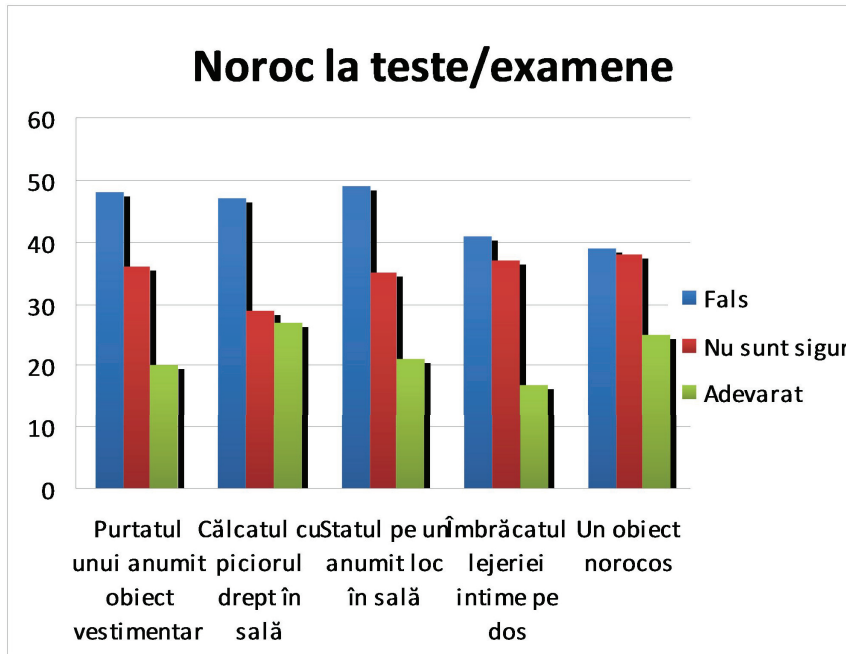


Figure 7. Superstitions related to exams

Almost all subjects (94.1%) say "good luck" when someone sneezes (which keeps more to politeness rather than superstition). Most of the subjects (80.8%) shows that they trust in man powers considering that the statement "No defect / disability of mind or body we can not refrain from anything if you have enough willpower" is true, and 95 subjects (79.1%) believe in the influence of planets on human nature.

The allegation that would indicate a high forehead indicates an intellectual superiority is the one that most subjects (75%) disagree.

Conclusions

They were studied two groups of students of equal size and evenly distributed by gender: 25 male students and 25 female students from the High School of Arts "Sabin Dragoi" Arad, grade-IX and twelfth-profile music.

The category that includes most positive answers is related to superstitions related to plants (VIII - 32 positive answers) followed by the superstitions related to objects (X 29 positive responses) and on the body (XI - 23 positive replies).

Overall, subjects turn out not to have too many superstitions related to tests / examinations, most statements being considered false.

The belief in superstitions is a general characteristic of a subject and not limited to a certain category of superstitions.

The more a person is superstitious (overall) the more it will allow more time performing rituals.

Also, how a person is superstitious (generally) the more it will give more importance to the appearance of others.

Almost all subjects (94.1%) say "good luck" when someone sneezes (which keeps more to politeness rather than superstition). Most of the subjects (80.8%) shows that they trust in man powers considering that the statement "No defect / disability of mind or body we can not refrain from anything if you have enough willpower" is true, and 95 subjects (79.1%) believe in the influence of planets on human nature.

The allegation that would indicate a high forehead indicates an intellectual superiority is the one that most subjects (75%) disagree.

The most commonly performed rituals refer to attract good fortune and respectively to the success of a test / exam. The rituals are rarely met for initiating a love relationship.

The women were found to be more superstitious in the superstitions related to animals. Women also tend to give more time to conduct rituals (the average time for fulfillment of rituals men tend to be "under a minute" and for women "between 1 minute and 5 minutes").

Students in grade-ninth prove to be more superstitious than students in class-XII. The biggest differences regard the superstitions related to: death and funeral; holidays. The smallest differences are in terms of superstitions concerning marriage and examinations.

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