

# ASSESSMENT OF ANXIETY AMONG HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH SPIRITUALITY

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## Abstract

The present study reports assessment of anxiety levels and its relationship with spirituality among postgraduate students of Mysore University. A total of 100 (66 male + 34 female) students studying in management and humanities were randomly selected for the study. They were administered IPAT anxiety scale (Cattel & Scheier, 1963) and Spirituality scale (Piedmont, 1999). Results revealed that an alarming 43% of the students suffer from morbid anxiety and only 4% of them were found to be secure. Demographic variables like gender, age and course did not have influence over anxiety. Further, students with different levels of anxiety did not differ in their spirituality scores. A general discussion on anxiety reduction techniques were also described at the end.

**Key Words:** Anxiety, happiness, post graduate students.

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Anxiety is often described as having cognitive, somatic, emotional, and behavioral components (Seligman, Walker and Rosenhan, 2001). Anxiety is an unpleasant, emotional state that involves a complex combination of emotion that includes fear, apprehension, and worry. It is often accompanied by physical sensation such as heart palpitations, nausea, chest pain, shortness of breath, or tension headache (Rosen & Schulkin 1998). The cognitive component entails expectation of a diffuse and uncertain danger. Somatically the body prepares the organism to deal with threat (known as an emergency reaction); blood pressure and heart rate are increased, sweating is increased, blood flow to the major muscle groups is increased, and immune digestive system functions are inhibited. Externally, some signs of anxiety may include pale skin, sweating, trembling and papillary dilation. Emotionally, anxiety causes a sense of dread or panic and physically causes nausea and chills. Behaviorally, both voluntary and involuntary behaviors may arise directed at escaping or avoiding the source of anxiety. These behaviors are frequent and often maladaptive, being most extreme in anxiety disorders. However, anxiety is not always pathological or maladaptive: it is a common emotion along with fear, anger, sadness, and happiness, and it has a very important function in relation to survival.

Several authors worked on anxiety and spirituality. Spirituality is one's character or quality that makes one transcend the barriers of worldliness, caste, creed and sensuality: and realize one's connection with the truth. In a narrow sense, it concerns with matters of the spirit and equally importantly it also relates to matters of sanity and of psychological health. Like some forms of religion, spirituality often focuses on personal experience. It may involve perceiving or, wishing to perceive life as more important (higher), more complex or more integrated with one's world view as contrasted with the merely sensual. Some Indian traditions define spirituality (Sanskrit: adhyatma) as that which pertains to the self or soul (Sanskrit: atman).

Some commentators regard spirituality as a two-stroke process: the "upward stroke" of inner growth, changing oneself as one changes one's relationship with the external universe: and the "downward stroke" of manifesting improvements in the physical reality around oneself as a result of the inward change. Another connotation suggests that change will come onto itself with the realization that all is oneself, whereupon the divine inward manifests the diverse outward for experience and progress. (Hein, David, 1997).

To date, the literature on religiosity and anxiety has yielded mixed results. Available results suggest that constellations of religious attitudes, commitment and

denominational subcultures have diverse relationships with types of anxiety. In the present study an attempt is made to assess the anxiety levels among post graduate students and its relationship with spirituality.

## Sample

Postgraduate students of University of Mysore studying in Management and Humanities were selected for the present study. Of the total 100 students included in the study 66 were males and remaining 34 were females. Of the 100 students selected for the study 43 of them were from management background (30 male + 13 female) and remaining 57 were from humanities (36 male + 21 female). Stratified Random sampling technique was used to select the sample. Their age varied from 21 to 30 years and the mean age of the sample was found to be 23.03 + 2.09 years.

## Instruments

### 1. IPAT Anxiety Scale (Cattell and Scheier, 1963)

The IPAT anxiety scale was developed from extensive research and practice as a means of getting clinical anxiety information rapidly, objectively, and in a standard manner. It is a brief, non-stressful, clinically valid questionnaire for measuring anxiety, applicable to all but the lowest educational levels and appropriate for ages of 14 or 15yrs onward throughout the adult range. The scale gives an accurate appraisal of free anxiety level, supplementary clinical diagnosis and facilitating all kinds of research or mass screening operations where very little diagnostic or assessment time can be spent with each examinee.

The test is easily administered individually or to large group at one time. It can even be self-administering. The IPAT anxiety scale consists of 40 questions. The items are divided mainly into two groups: a) those which manifestly refer to anxiety, the score from which may be called overt, symptomatic, conscious anxiety (in the last 20 items of the test), and into b) the more covert hidden-purpose cryptic probes in the first 20 items. Dr. A.W Bending has made use of Kuder-Richarson formula 20 and found the homogeneity values +. 60, +.63 and +.63 for the twenty items of the covert subscale; +.75, +.79 and +.76 for the twenty items of the overt subscale. The actual dependability (retest) reliability figures from data on 70 cases in IPAT scale files give a value of +.89 and + .82 for the covert and overt subscales, respectively. (A.W.Bending).

## 2. Aspires Spiritual Transcendence Scale (Piedmont, 1999)

The Spiritual Transcendence Scale (ST) represents the ability of an individual to stand outside of his/her immediate sense of time and place and to view life from a larger, more objective perspective. This transcendent perspective is one in which the person sees a fundamental unity underlying the diverse striving of nature. People who high on score ST believe that there is a larger plan and meaning to life, something beyond our mortal existence. Despite all the ups & downs in life there is something more permanent and constant that gives direction, meaning and value to life. Those who scored low on ST are more concerned with the marital aspects of life and see no larger meaning to life other than what life offers in the here and now. There are three aspects to ST: prayer fulfillment, a feeling of joy and contentment that result from personal encounters with the god of one's understanding; universality, a belief that all of life is intimately tied together; and connectedness, a belief that one is part of a larger human reality that cuts across generations and groups. Totally there are 9 questions and 3 items each is focused on the three different aspects i.e. items 1, 4, 8 on prayer fulfillment, 6, 7, 9 on universality and 2, 3, 5 on connectedness. All the three subscales have acceptable alpha reliability: Prayer fulfillment (.85), universality (.85), and connectedness (.65), (Piedmont, 1999), contributing to the reliability of the overall scale, (Piedmont, 1999).

### Procedure

The tests were administered individually to each subject in two sessions and each session lasted for about 25-30 minutes. In the first session, rapport was established with the subject and they were asked to introduce themselves. The purpose of the study was made clear to them. Then they were administered the IPAT anxiety scale. They were given appropriate instructions and the questions were read out to them. They were asked to indicate their responses in the respective sheets given to them. In the second session, the subjects were administered the spirituality scale and they were asked to indicate their responses in the scoring sheet given to them. Whenever the meaning of certain words was not clear to the students, they were made clear to them by one of the test administrators. Later both the scales were scored according to the manual and a master chart was prepared for statistical analysis.

### Statistical Analysis

Chi-square test was applied to find out the significance of difference between frequencies of three anxiety levels - secure, normal and morbidity. Contingency coefficient test was applied to find out the association between gender, course, age

and anxiety levels, and F test was applied for significance of difference between secure, normal and morbidity in their spirituality scores. The statistical analyses were performed through SPSS for Windows, Version 14 (Evaluation version).

## Results

Table 1 presents analysis and test statistics of anxiety levels by various demographic variables and spirituality

**Table 1 Analysis and test statistics of anxiety levels by various demographic variables and spirituality**

Variable			Anxiety Levels			Test statistics	P value
			Secure	Normal	Morbidity		
Overall		Frequency	4	53	43	X <sup>2</sup> =40.20	.000 (HS)
		%	4.0%	53.0%	43.0%		

Gender	Male	Frequency	2	38	26	CC= .133	.404 (NS)
		%	3.0%	57.6%	39.4%		
	Female	Frequency	2	15	17		
		%	5.9%	44.1%	50.0%		

Course	Management	Frequency	2	27	14	CC=.180	.187 (NS)
		%	4.7%	62.8%	32.6%		
	Humanities	Frequency	2	26	29		
		%	3.5%	45.6%	50.9%		

Age	Below 25	Frequency	2	27	25	CC=.072	.770 (NS)
		%	3.7%	50.0%	46.3%		
	Above 25	Frequency	2	26	18		
		%	4.3%	56.5%	39.1%		

Spirituality	Mean	30.75	31.28	31.51	F=.073	.930 (NS)
	S.D	1.89	4.41	4.46		

**Note:**  $X^2$ =Chi-square; CC=Contingency Coefficient; F=Fisher's Value; P=Probability  
 HS=Highly significant; NS - Non-significant

## Levels of Anxiety

Of the 100 students studied in the present sample 43% of them were found to have morbid anxiety, 53.0% of them had normal anxiety and only 4% of the sample were secured. In other words, an alarming rate of 43% of the students was found to suffer from anxiety. Chi-square test revealed a significant difference ( $X^2=40.2$ ;  $P<.000$ ) between frequencies of secure, normal and morbid anxiety classifications.

**Influence of secondary variables (Gender, Course and Age):** None of the secondary variables like gender, course and age were found to have significant association with anxiety levels as all the obtained Contingency coefficient values were found to be non-significant.

**Spirituality and anxiety levels:** One way ANOVA revealed a non-significant difference in the mean spirituality scores of students having secure, normal and morbid anxieties ( $F=.073$ ;  $P<.0930$ ). In other words anxiety was found to be independent of spirituality. The mean spirituality scores of students having secure, normal and morbid anxieties are 30.75, 31.28 and 31.51 respectively which are statistically same.

## Discussion

The main findings of the present study are

- 43% of the post graduate students are found to suffer from morbid anxiety and only 4% of them are secure.
- Demographic variables like gender, age and course of the subjects did not have significant influence over anxiety.
- Spirituality and anxiety were independent of each other.

The results of the present study with reference to anxiety and spirituality are not in agreement with the study done by Kaczorowski JM (2002), who reported a consistent

inverse relationship was found between spiritual well being and state trait anxiety, regardless of influences of gender, age, marital status, diagnosis, group participation, length of time since diagnosis among cancer patients. Investigation by Davis, Kerr and Kurpius (2003) on adolescents at risk found that the higher the spiritual well-being, existential well-being, religious well-being and intrinsic religious orientation were among males, the lower the anxiety. Harris, Schoneman and Carrera (2002) suggest that a committed, related approach to religiosity may be associated with lower levels of general anxiety. A principal components analysis suggests that a constellation of religious variables—which involves religious commitment aspects of one's prayer life, and relating to others in the religious reference group—has a significant negative relationship with trait anxiety. Further male and female comparison on anxiety revealed no difference in the present investigation. The study by Greenfield, Parle and Holder (2001) indicated that male and female students have different anxieties. Women reported being more anxious than men, both overall and for most individual situations.

As far as the high anxiety levels among students are considered, since most of them experience anxiety, we suggest that we need to re-design our courses, and particularly the so-called "Beginning Courses", to reduce additional stresses on already pressured students. Perhaps, therefore, we also need to ensure that students have sufficient early contact with teachers to allay the anxieties they are experiencing about contact with counselors and to counteract the "anecdotes" handed down from more senior students. Some degree of acquaintance of introductory courses should be introduced, so that those with different anxieties can have them addressed and begin to develop their skills within a supportive environment. It appears that career choices are significantly affected by student anxieties (Dillner, 1993; Field & Lennox, 1996). Having a tough competition in the modern world, it would be appropriate to prepare the student community to face them is a worthwhile exercise.

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