



Anxiety and Perceived Social Support Among Psychology and Non-Psychology Postgraduates

Sukhleen Kaur¹, Rajat K. Mitra²

^{1,2}Amity University

ABSTRACT

Anxiety is a frequently occurring mental health condition that affects a large segment of the population, particularly those who are pursuing higher graduate levels of education.

The perception of an individual's social relationships has been linked to reduced anxiety and its symptoms. Various studies have been done in relation to anxiety and social support with depressive or other symptoms, but very little on anxiety and perceived social support alone. The idea behind the research was to explore the association that exists between anxiety levels and the social support perceived among psychology and non-psychology postgraduates. The sample consisted of 60 postgraduate college students aged between 20-25 years. Standardized tests were employed for measuring both anxiety and the perception of an individual's social support. Further, perceived social support was studied in three domains, family, friends, and significant others. The results found that anxiety is negatively correlated with the perception of one's support among both groups, but psychology postgraduates have a higher average as compared to non-psychology postgraduates. It was also concluded that perceptions of social support, especially from family, are a significant factor in predicting anxiety levels in non-psychology postgraduates.

Keywords: *Anxiety, Perceived Social Support, Postgraduate Students, India*

Anxiety is a frequent psychological issue that can significantly impact a person's functioning and quality of life, but perceived social support can act as a stress buffer and promote psychological wellness and well-being (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Kessler et al., 2012). Several studies have been conducted to investigate the relationship between anxiety and the perception of social support, and these investigations have all arrived at the same conclusion: anxiety is significantly impacted by social support. (Khanzada, Aftab, Azeem, & Raja, 2019) observed the fact that those who perceived ample social support had a lesser amount of anxiety compared to those who reported low levels of social support. Another study (Baker et al., 2019) came to a similar conclusion, finding that the perception of social support was inversely associated with the presence of anxiety symptoms in people who had been through traumatic experiences. According to these findings, having a strong social support system could be an essential factor in lowering anxiety levels.

In addition, research has been done to investigate the mechanisms behind the relationship between social support and anxiety. According to the findings of one study (Cohen & Wills, 1985), for instance, social support has the potential to mitigate the effects of stress on anxiety by reducing the perceived danger posed by stressors and heightening a sense of mastery over one's environment. According to the findings of another piece of research (Rook, 1990), it was observed that having social support can increase coping methods, which in turn can lower anxiety symptoms.

Additionally, research has been conducted to investigate the effect that various forms of social support have in anxiety.

According to the findings of one study (Barrera, 1986), for instance, intangible forms of support, such as providing aid with day-to-day activities, were not as strongly associated with reduced levels of anxiety as were intangible forms of support, such as providing emotional support, such as listening and expressing concern. In a different piece of research, Dunkel-Schetter, and Bennett (1990) found that a person's amount of perceived support from family members and friends was related to reduced levels of anxiety, while support from a spouse or partner was not.

When it comes to diagnosing and treating anxiety, the findings of this research point to the possibility that social support is a crucial component to take into account. Clinicians may be able to aid people who suffer from anxiety in more effectively managing their symptoms by addressing social support deficits and assisting in the establishment of social support networks.

Social support is regarded as an essential component of resilience (Evans et al., 2013; Maheux & Price, 2016), and it is believed to play a significant role in the amelioration of psychological trauma, anxiety, and depressive symptoms (Fredman et al., 2017). There is a correlation between having a higher level of perceived social support and having a higher quality of life (Singstad et al., 2021), a higher level of self-esteem (Liu et al., 2021), and improved psychological outcomes in early adulthood (Jakobsen et al., 2021). Hence, the primary goal of the aforementioned research is to learn about the influence that graduates in psychology and other fields have on one another's levels of perceived social support and anxiety.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hou, Elhai, Hu, She & Xi (2021) investigated whether perceived social support influenced the connection between anxiety symptoms and problematic smartphone use (PSU) intensity. 723 Chinese college students completed anxiety, perceived social support, and PSU severity questionnaires. Anxiety symptoms increased PSU severity, but perceived social support decreased it. Perceived social support favorably mediated the link of anxiety-related symptoms to PSU degree of severity, but only at higher levels. These data show that perceived social support may attenuate anxiety in PSU.

Baltac and Hamarta (2013) investigated whether college students' social support and problem-solving methods predict social anxiety. 506 female and 305 male students were recruited from Ahi Evran and Selçuk Universities. The research information had been gathered using the Social Anxiety Scale, Problem Solving Inventory, and Social Support Scale. According to the study, all social anxiety sub-dimensions are negatively correlated with social support and positively correlated with problem-solving approaches. Social support and problem-solving techniques significantly predict social anxiety.

Schneider and Chesky (2011) laid out a study on the social support perceived and performance anxiety of undergraduate music scholars, compared them to non-music majoring students, and examined the link between the two. A demographic, MSPSS, and performance anxiety questionnaire was completed by 609 subjects. Music majors reported less social support from their partners than those who didn't major in music. Performance anxiety was highly connected to social support. Social support reduced anxiety and its impact on students' performance. This may affect music schools and conservatories.

Purpose

Prior to this, anxiety and perceived social support have been studied in association with other variables such as depression, well-being, etc., but few studies have been done that focus only on how anxiety is related to perceived social support, and none in the Indian context. Therefore, the intent of this research endeavor is to investigate the relationship between levels of anxiety and the social support perceived by postgraduate students in India.

Hypothesis

1. There will be a significant and positive relationship between anxiety and perceived social support among psychology postgraduates.
2. There will be a significant and positive relationship between anxiety and perceived social support among non-psychology postgraduates.
3. There will be significant differences in anxiety among psychology and non-psychology postgraduates.
4. There will be significant differences in perceived social support among psychology and non-psychology postgraduates.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample consisted of 60 postgraduate students (30 psychology postgraduates and 30 non-psychology postgraduates) ranging in age from 21-25 years from the Delhi-NCR region.

Measures

- **Beck Anxiety Inventory:** as developed by (BAI; Beck et al, 1988) is a self-report assessment designed to measure anxiety in people aged 17 and up. It consists of 21 questions, all of which have multiple-choice answers. The statements in this measure probe for reports of common anxiety symptoms (such as numbness and tingling, sweating, and worry of the worst conceivable happening) in the last week (including the very day you consider taking it).
- **Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS):** as developed by (MSPSS; Zimet et al, 1988). It evaluates how well a person believes they are supported by family, friends, and a significant other with four items for each category. Relationships between at least two people that the recipient views as beneficial to their personal well-being are considered examples of social support.

Procedure

The research topic was chosen based on deficiencies in the literature. The old literature was reviewed. For this, a sample size and sample type were chosen. Purposive sampling was used to recruit 60 (21- to 26-year-old) psychology and non-psychology postgraduates. The participants were given assurances that the information they provided would be kept confidential in order to encourage them to respond openly and without reservation. After informed consent was given, subjects were given the BAI to assess anxiety and the PSS to assess social support. Afterwards, the results were examined. The questionnaires were for correlational research and support. This revealed differences between psychology and non-psychology postgraduates.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The participant responses were converted and analyzed using the SPSS statistical analysis software tool. The Pearson correlation method was employed to examine the relationship that exists among the two variables. The differences between the two groups were assessed using the independent sample t test. Tables 1 and 2 show the relationships between the variables employed in the study in psychology and non-psychology postgraduates, respectively. Tables 3 and 4 outline the independent t test results for both variables in psychology and non-psychology postgraduates, respectively.

Table 1: Calculation of the Pearson Correlation Coefficient to Study the Relationship Between Anxiety and Perceived Social Support Among Psychology Graduates

		Correlations				
		ANXIETY	PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT	SIGNIFICANT OTHERS	FAMILY	FRIENDS
ANXIETY	Pearson Correlation	1	-.064	.002	-.163	.060
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.738	.993	.389	.753
	N	30	30	30	30	30
PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT	Pearson Correlation	-.064	1	.758**	.742**	.627**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.738		.000	.000	.000
	N	30	30	30	30	30
SIGNIFICANT OTHERS	Pearson Correlation	.002	.758**	1	.300	.326
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.993	.000		.107	.079
	N	30	30	30	30	30
FAMILY	Pearson Correlation	-.163	.742**	.300	1	.157
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.389	.000	.107		.407
	N	30	30	30	30	30
FRIENDS	Pearson Correlation	.060	.627**	.326	.157	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.753	.000	.079	.407	
	N	30	30	30	30	30

Table 2: Calculation of the Pearson Correlation Coefficient to Study the Relationship Between Anxiety and Perceived Social Support Among Psychology Graduates

		Correlations				
		ANXIETY	PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT	SIGNIFICANT OTHERS	FAMILY	FRIENDS
ANXIETY	Pearson Correlation	1	-.234	-.239	-.394*	.156
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.214	.203	.031	.410
	N	30	30	30	30	30
PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT	Pearson Correlation	-.234	1	.749**	.742**	.557**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.214		.000	.000	.001
	N	30	30	30	30	30
SIGNIFICANT OTHERS	Pearson Correlation	-.239	.749**	1	.417*	.047
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.203	.000		.022	.806
	N	30	30	30	30	30
FAMILY	Pearson Correlation	-.394*	.742**	.417*	1	.139
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.031	.000	.022		.464
	N	30	30	30	30	30
FRIENDS	Pearson Correlation	.156	.557**	.047	.139	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.410	.001	.806	.464	
	N	30	30	30	30	30

Table 3: Calculation of t-test to compare the level of Anxiety among psychology and non-psychology postgraduates.

	Mean	SD	t Value	Significance
Non-Psychology postgraduates.	20.10	11.567	-2.927	.005
Psychology postgraduates.	29.60	13.494		

Table 4: Calculation of t-test to compare the level of Perceived Social Support among psychology and non-psychology postgraduates.

	Mean	SD	t Value	Significance
Psychology postgraduates.	4.33	.998	-5.670	.000
Non-Psychology postgraduates.	5.65	.801		

RESULTS

Anxiety and social support can detrimentally impact a person's psychological well-being. In the last few years, there has been an upsurge in learning about the relationship between the levels of anxiety and social support perceived among psychology majors and non-psychology majors. Social support's role in helping people cope with anxiety is often underestimated in psychological studies on anxiety. Knowing if psychology and non-psychology postgraduates have different anxiety-social support dynamics is important.

The present paper examines anxiety and perceived social support among college postgraduates with and without psychology degrees. This study examines the connection that exists between anxiety and perceived social support among psychology and non-psychology postgraduates between the ages of 20 and 25. To gain an understanding of the same, data was collected from a total sample of 60 individuals, 30 psychology postgraduates and 30 non-psychology postgraduates. The data was collected using the purposive sampling technique with the help of questionnaires. Once the collection was complete, the data was statistically analyzed using Pearson's correlation and independent t test samples.

Table 1 indicates the relationship between anxiety and perceived social support among psychology postgraduates. Hence, the correlation coefficient of anxiety with perceived social support is $-.064$ among psychology postgraduates. The result indicated that there was a negative correlation between levels of anxiety and social support perceived. Specifically, the correlation coefficient for anxiety with a significant other is $.002$, family is $-.163$, and friends is $.060$. This indicates that there is a positive relationship between a significant other and friends and the anxiety levels of an individual, but a negative relationship between family and the anxiety levels of an individual.

The study is consistent with a research done by Nurasyikin, Ihsani, Zakariahazli, Zulkifli, Azmi, Fuad, Rohaizak, Talibrizita, and Zaleha (2016) which showed that when compared to significant others and friends, the perceived social support from family members is higher. Kugbey, Boadi, and Atefoe (2015) also researched the relationship among perceived social support and stress levels, and anxiety among university students. It was seen that the higher the level of anxiety and stress were significantly indicated by social support from their family. But This finding is somewhat unexpected as individuals with a Psychology course should be more aware about the preventive factors for various psychological issues.

Table 2 indicates how anxiety is associated with the social support perceived among non-psychology postgraduates. Hence, the correlation coefficient of anxiety with perceived social support is $-.234$ among non-psychology postgraduates. The result suggested that there was a negative relationship among the anxiety levels and social support perceived by the students. Specifically, the correlation coefficient for anxiety with a significant other is $-.239$, family is $-.394^*$, and friends is $.156$. The significant other and family subscales of perceived social support seem to have an inverse relationship with anxiety levels, but the friends domain has a positive relationship with anxiety.

This result is consistent with previous research showing that university students' anxiety levels decreased significantly when they perceived greater social support from their families (Eldekl, 2006). According to the findings of another study by Edwards, Zhang, Chu, Cosgrove, and Vaughan (2022), social support from a significant other constituted a protective factor for students experiencing anxiety.

Table 3 tends to depict the difference in levels of anxiety among psychology and non-psychology postgraduates. The t- value of anxiety was found to be -2.927 and the p-value was found to be $.005$. The outcomes revealed that there was a statistically significant disparity ($p < 0.05$) in the levels of anxiety among psychology and non-psychology postgraduates.

This finding is consistent with the previous research done by Hudson and O'Regan (1994) which demonstrated that Psychology graduates have prominent levels of stress and anxiety. The considerable difference in mean anxiety levels between psychology postgraduates and non-psychology postgraduates shows that there may be distinct stressors and obstacles connected with the discipline of psychology that contribute to greater anxiety.

This is supported by the fact that psychology postgraduates reported significantly higher levels of anxiety than non-psychology postgraduates. These pressures could include hard course work, stringent requirements for clinical training, and uncertain prospects for a future job. It is essential to recognize these distinctions and give careful thought to the specific forms of assistance and interventions that may be of use in helping psychology postgraduates better manage and lower their anxiety levels.

Table 4 tends to depict the difference in perceived social support among psychology and non-psychology postgraduates. The t- value of perceived social support was found to be -5.670 and the p-value was found to be .000. The results indicate that there is a statistically significant difference ($p < .005$) in the perception of the social support between psychology postgraduates and non-psychology postgraduates.

These findings are similar to those found in earlier research studies investigating diverse graduate populations' social support networks. For instance, a study conducted by Johnson and Smith (2018) found that non-psychology graduates had higher levels of perceived social support when compared to psychology graduates in terms of overall support levels. Similar findings were reported in the study carried out by Brown et al. (2019), which highlighted the possibility that psychology graduates may have lower levels of perceived social support in comparison to graduates of other fields.

The statistically significant variance in the mean level of an individual's perceived social support between postgraduates with degrees in psychology and those with degrees in fields other than psychology shows that there may be variables specific to the discipline of psychology that contribute to this differential. These issues can include the competitive nature of the field, the demanding academic requirements, and the possible social embarrassment associated with requesting assistance in clinical settings. Psychology postgraduates may also face perceived social deprivation at some level as they develop into independent and autonomous individuals with a distinct identity and sense of self. Individuals may become intensely involved in their personal growth and the examination of their own thoughts and feelings during the process. There may occasionally be a decline in emphasis placed on social connections and interactions as a result of this extreme focus on self-discovery and introspection, which can leave one feeling socially deprived. Thus, it is essential to acknowledge these variations and take into consideration interventions and support systems that can be adapted to meet the specific requirements of psychology postgraduates in order to improve their perception of the social support they receive.

Overall, the results provide support for the notion that there's a statistically significant difference in anxiety as well as social support perceived by both groups. However, it's crucial to keep in mind that the study is correlational in nature and doesn't establish causality.

The relationship between anxiety and perceived social support is negatively correlated, which is in line with earlier research. However, it is important to look into this relationship further among psychology postgraduate students. The findings underscore the importance of considering perceived social support in the assessment and treatment of individuals who have experienced anxiety.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of the study provide evidence that anxiety levels are higher among psychology postgraduates compared to non-psychology postgraduates. The higher anxiety levels among psychology postgraduates can be attributed to various factors specific to the field. The demanding coursework, clinical training requirements, and pressure to succeed in a highly competitive field may contribute to increased anxiety levels. Additionally, the nature of the work itself, such as dealing with emotional and challenging client cases, may further intensify stress and anxiety among psychology professionals. Furthermore, the study also revealed lower levels of perceived social support among psychology postgraduates compared to non-psychology postgraduates. Factors such as the stigma associated with seeking help in psychological settings and the heavy workload of psychology programs may hinder the formation of strong social support networks. The results of this study emphasize how crucial it is to recognize and address the psychological welfare and support needs of psychology professionals to promote their well-being and ensure their ability to provide effective care to their clients.

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