"Examining The Impact Of Academic Discipline And Course Levels On Anxiety In College Students"

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Abstract

College is a gateway to higher education, offering specialized knowledge and expertise in various fields. Obtaining a college degree enhances career prospects and opens doors to better job opportunities and higher earning potential. College students are a diverse group with varying interests, backgrounds, and aspirations. Overall, college students and college years play a crucial role in shaping the future of individuals and societies, fostering personal growth, intellectual development, and societal progress.

Methodology: A cross-sectional, and correlation study design was used in the present study, to examine impact of stream of study and educational class on anxiety among college students. ADSS developed by Bhatnagar et.al. (2011) was used to assess mental health problems (Anxiety) among college students. The present study sample consisted of a total of 1455 male and female college students who are pursuing 1st, 2nd, and 3rd years bachelor's degrees in all streams (Arts, Commerce, Science) in Government and Private degree colleges of Ankola taluk of Uttara Kannada district.

Results revealed that, about 68% of college students were suffering from anxiety, The remaining 32%, of the students were seen under the normal category. A higher percentage of the samples were seen under severe levels of anxiety (35%) compared to moderate (22%) and mild (11%) levels of anxiety. The association between the stream of study and Anxiety levels shows that, Compared to Commerce students (68%) and Science students (68.4%), more students of Arts stream (81.1%), were facing mild to severe anxiety levels. Overall, more than 50% of students from all streams were facing more anxiety. A statistically significant association was observed between the stream of study and anxiety levels ($\chi^2(6)$ =190.02, p<0.01). Association between educational class and anxiety revealed that, 4 A significant association was observed between class/year of study and level of anxiety ($\chi^2(6)$ = 17.02, p<0.01). About 71.8% of first-year students experienced mild to severe anxiety. Among second-year degree students, this figure was 68.5%, while 64% of third-year students reported similar anxiety levels. While more than half of students across all years faced this concerning issue, it was noticed that the percentage of students experiencing anxiety decreased as they progressed through higher classes.

Conclusion: From the present study, it may be concluded that college students of the present study were more vulnerable to mental health problems like anxiety. The study theoretically contributes to the body of scientific knowledge on prevalence of anxiety among college students. The findings underscore the urgency for intervention and support strategies tailored specifically for college students.

Key words: College students, Anxiety, stream of study, class

Introduction

Mental health problems have been increasing among young people in the nation and around the world. The more common problems faced by college students are stress, anxiety, symptoms of depression, eating problems, and other psychological issues, which have significant negative impacts on their life (Saleem, et.al. 2013). According to the findings of the National Mental Health Survey (NMHS) (2016) commissioned by the Centre and implemented by the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), about 8% of the population suffers from mental illness and needs mental health care.

College is a gateway to higher education, offering specialized knowledge and expertise in various fields. Obtaining a college degree enhances career prospects and opens doors to better job opportunities and higher earning potential. College students are a diverse group with varying interests, backgrounds, and aspirations. Overall, college students and college years play a crucial role in shaping the future of individuals and societies, fostering personal growth, intellectual development, and societal progress.

Methodology

A cross-sectional, and correlation study design was used in the present study. The researcher prepared a questionnaire to elicit socio-demographic information, of college students. A pilot study was carried out to check the feasibility of the self-developed tool. The questionnaire was slightly modified and finalized for the data collection. Prior to commencement of further research work an Ethical clearance was obtained from the "Institutional Human Ethical Committee", University of Mysore. The present study was carried out in Ankola Taluk of Uttara Kannada district of Karnataka State. It is a town municipal council and one of the taluks in Uttara Kannada district. As per the census 2011, Ankola taluk has a total population of 107332 of which 53961 are males and 53371 are females. The sample for the present study comprised of college students(n=1455) who were pursuing a Bachelor's degree in both Government and Private degree colleges of Ankola taluk of Uttara Kannada district.

ADSS developed by Bhatnagar et.al. (2011) was used to assess mental health problems (Anxiety) among college students. This test has three sub-scales focusing on Anxiety, Depression, and Stress. This scale consisted of 48 items covering physical, cognitive, emotional, and behavioural symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress disorders. The ADSS consisted of 48 items (19 items on Anxiety) that were divided into 3 subscales i.e. Anxiety, Depression, Stress. Anxiety is an emotion characterized by feelings of tension (feeling of numbness, faintness, nervousness, etc.), worried thoughts (sacred without any good reasons, nightmares), and physical changes (dryness of mouth, difficulty in swallowing, increased heart beating) in the individuals. Considering the total score for the manifestation of anxiety in the scale used, the study sample was classified as normal, mild, moderate, and severe levels of anxiety. The responses on each item were given in terms of Yes and No. Each item was scored 1 for Yes and 0 for No response. A higher score indicates that the college students were experiencing greater anxiety

- **Educational stream:** Arts, Commerce, and Science are the three main educational streams in degree colleges. Educational streams are considered as one of the independent variables.

- **Educational Class:** College students studying in the 1st year, 2nd year, and 3rd year were considered as an independent variable.

The data collection process involved the investigator personally visiting all colleges to administer the questionnaires. The collected information was consolidated, tabulated, and subjected to statistical analysis using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 for Windows.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. Prevalence of Anxiety among College Students

	Levels			
	Normal (0-3)	**Mild (3-5)**	**Moderate (5-9)**	**Severe (Above 9)**
Anxiety	460 (31.6%)	167 (11.5%)	313 (21.5%)	515 (35.4%)

The present study sample consisted of a total of 1455 male and female college students who are pursuing 1st, 2nd, and 3rd years bachelor's degrees in all streams (Arts, Commerce, Science) in Government and Private degree colleges of Ankola taluk of Uttara Kannada district.

The Anxiety, Depression Stress Scale (ADSS) developed by Bhatnagar et.al. (2011) was used to assess Anxiety, Depression, and Stress, among college students. This test has three sub-scales focusing on Anxiety, Depression, and Stress. The prevalence of anxiety, depression, and stress levels among students were discussed below.
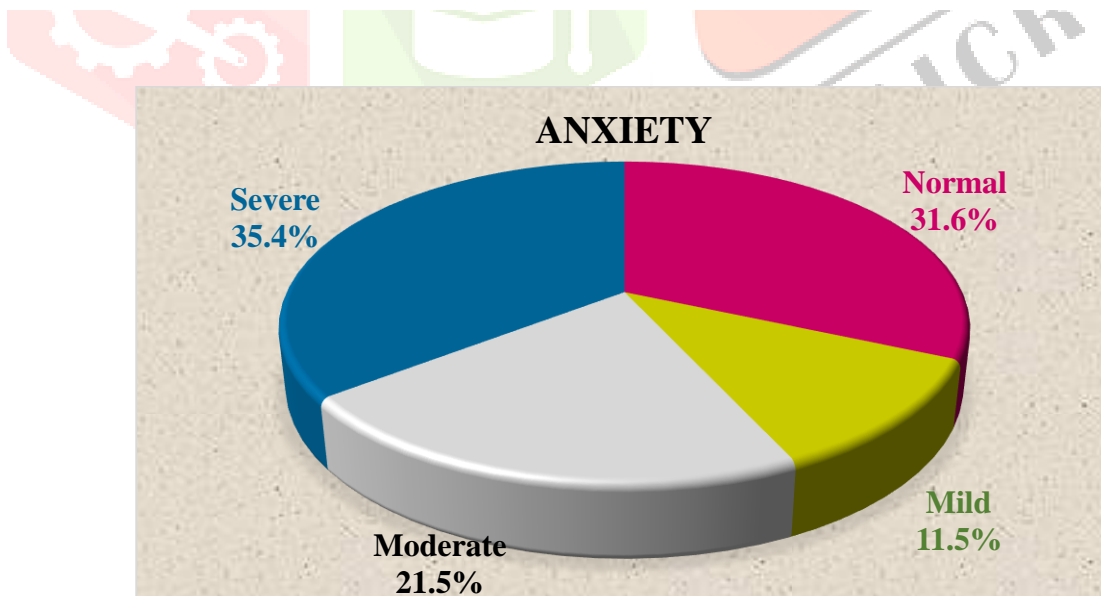

Fig 1: Prevalence of Anxiety among College Students

As per Table 1, about 68% of college students were suffering from anxiety, The remaining 32%, of the students were seen under the normal category. A higher percentage of the samples were seen under severe levels of anxiety (35%) compared to moderate (22%) and mild (11%) levels of anxiety.

Table 2: Association between Stream of study and Anxiety

Variables		Levels				χ2 value
		Normal (0-3)	**Mild (3-5)**	**Moderate (5-9)**	**Severe (>9)**	(df) Sig
Stream of study	Arts	88(18.9%)	31(6.7%)	87(18.7%)	259(55.7%)	190.02**
	Commerce	243(31.9%)	102(13.4%)	202(26.5%)	214(28.1%)	6
	Science	129(56.3%)	34(14.8%)	24(10.5%)	42(18.3%)	0.000

* Indicates significant at P< 0.05   ** Indicates significant at P<0.01
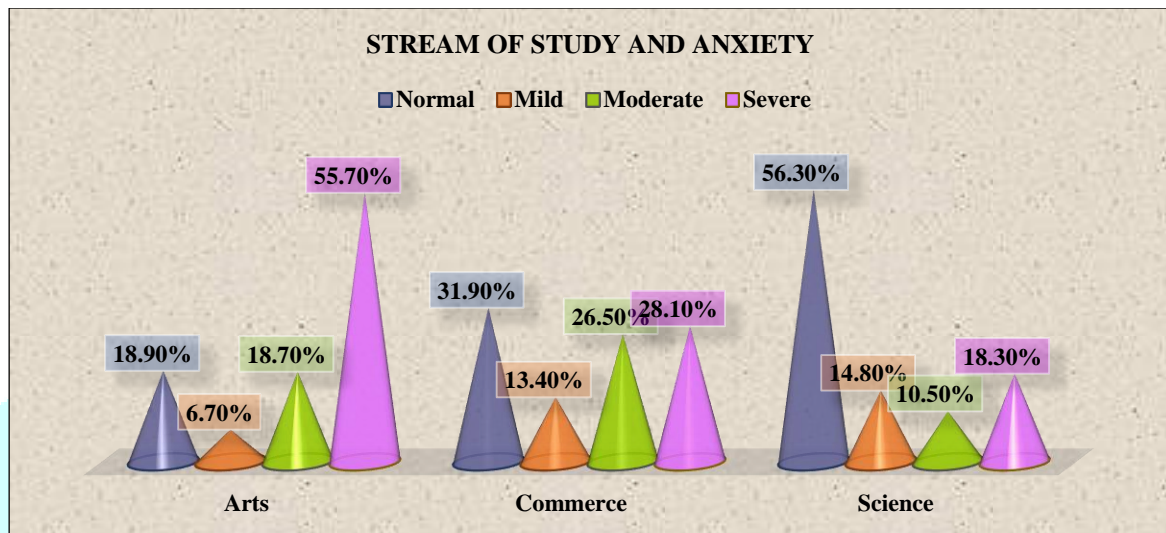
**Fig 2: Association between Stream of study and Anxiety**

The association between the stream of study and Anxiety levels in the table 2 shows, that 18.9% of Arts students were at a normal level, 6.7% had mild anxiety levels, 18.7% had a moderate anxiety level and 55.7% of arts students had a severe anxiety level. Among Commerce students 31.9% were seen under the normal category, 13.4 % had mild anxiety levels, 26.5 % were at moderate anxiety levels and 28.1% of students had severe anxiety levels. Among Science students, 56.3% were at normal levels, 14.8 % had mild anxiety levels, 10.5 % had moderate anxiety levels and 18.3% of students had severe anxiety levels. Compared to Commerce students (68%) and Science students (68.4%), more students of Arts stream (81.1%), were facing mild to severe anxiety levels. Overall, more than 50% of students from all streams were facing more anxiety. A statistically significant association was observed between the stream of study and anxiety levels ($\chi^2(6)$ =190.02, p<0.01).

Contrary to the current study's outcomes, the research by Wani et al. (2016) revealed that science students exhibited higher levels of anxiety (96.14%) compared to Arts students (73.84%). Similarly, Chokshi, et. al. (2021) study demonstrated a statistical significance in the occurrence and severity of anxiety in the science students as compared to, and non-science students.

Table 3: Association between Educational Class and Anxiety

Variables		Levels				$\chi 2$ value
		Normal (0-3)	**Mild (3-5)**	**Moderate (5-9)**	**Severe (>9)**	(df) Sig
Educational Class	1st year	158(28.2%)	67(11.9%)	110(19.6%)	226(40.3%)	17.02**
	2nd year	142(31.5%)	51(11.3%)	96(21.3%)	162(35.9%)	6
	3rd year	160(36.1%)	49(11.1%)	107(24.2%)	127(28.7%)	0.009

* Indicates significant at P< 0.05   ** Indicates significant at P<0.01
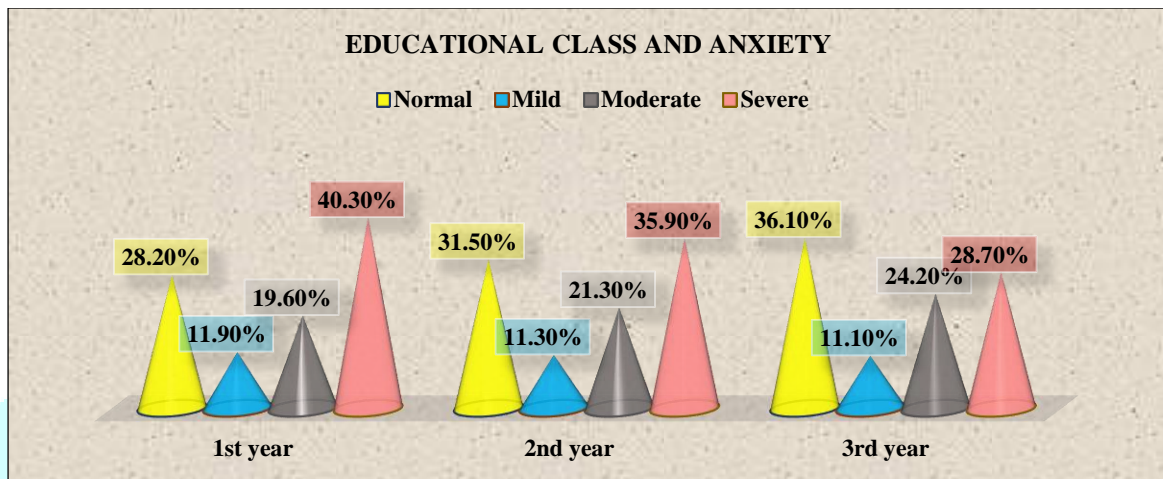
Fig 3: Association between Educational class and Anxiety

Association between educational class and anxiety in table 3, revealed that among 1st-year students. 28.2% of students were at normal levels and the remaining students i.e. 11.9% were at mild, 19.6% at moderate, and 40.3% at severe anxiety levels. Among 2nd year students 31.5% were at a normal level and the remaining 68.5% were seen under mild to high levels of anxiety i.e. 11.3% had mild, 21.3% had moderate and 35.9% had severe levels of anxiety. Among 3rd year students, 36.1% were normal and the remaining 63.9% were seen under mild to severe levels of anxiety i.e. 11.1% had mild, 24.2% had moderate, and 28.7 % had severe anxiety levels. A significant association was observed between class/year of study and level of anxiety ($\chi^2(6) = 17.02$, p<0.01). About 71.8% of first-year students experienced mild to severe anxiety. Among second-year degree students, this figure was 68.5%, while 64% of third-year students reported similar anxiety levels. While more than half of students across all years faced this concerning issue, it was noticed that the percentage of students experiencing anxiety decreased as they progressed through higher classes.

However contrasting result was observed in the study conducted by Ahad et.al. (2021) on 507 dental UG students. Findings showed that anxiety was significantly higher among the clinical students than in the preclinical students, and it was significantly higher in both the third- and final years than the second-year students.

On the whole, the higher prevalence rate of mild to severe levels of anxiety was noticed among Arts students (81.1%) and students studying in 1st year (71.8%), than their respective counterparts. Approximately 43.7% to 81.1% of study samples in different variable groups were suffering from mild to severe levels of anxiety. Significant associations were found between independent variable groups, namely stream of study and educational class/year of study, with levels of anxiety.

Conclusion

From the present study, it may be concluded that college students of the present study were more vulnerable to mental health problems like anxiety. The study theoretically contributes to the body of scientific knowledge on prevalence of anxiety among college students. The findings underscore the urgency for intervention and support strategies tailored specifically for college students. It is imperative to equip them with the requisite guidance, training, and life skills essential in addressing mental health concerns. Moreover, fostering functional coping skills to navigate through adversities and challenging situations is paramount.

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