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A Cross-Sectional Study on Anxiety, Stress, and Depression among Academicians and Students using DASS-21 Scale

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ABSTRACT: Anxiety, stress, and depression are frequently reported psychological concerns among both academicians and students, often arising from academic pressure, workload demands, and personal or environmental challenges. This cross-sectional descriptive study aims to examine the patterns and manifestations of these emotional conditions as observed across academic and clinical settings. Drawing from documented experiences in psychiatric, psychological, rehabilitation, and academic units, the study explores how individuals express emotional distress through behavioral, cognitive, and physiological indicators such as persistent worry, irritability, low mood, and reduced concentration. The study included 65 working participants, with 42 academicians (22 as teaching and 20 as non-teaching), 10 students and 13 other professionals aged between 20 to 40 years, selected from various cities in India using the random sampling method. All participants completed the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21) questionnaire through Forms. Observations made during case histories, Mental Status Examinations (MSE), psychological assessments, and relaxation-based interventions such as Jacobson's Progressive Muscle Relaxation (JPMR) provided insight into common emotional difficulties faced by academicians and students. The findings highlight that real-world exposure helps identify symptom patterns, understand contributing factors, and apply appropriate strategies for emotional management. Overall, the study underscores the importance of recognizing stress, anxiety, and depression within academic environments and emphasizes the value of structured psychological observation in understanding these concerns.

KEYWORDS: Anxiety, Stress, Depression, Academicians, Students, Emotional distress, Psychological assessment

I. INTRODUCTION

Anxiety, stress, and depression are among the most commonly reported psychological concerns in academic environments, affecting both academicians and students across various levels of education. These emotional conditions influence cognitive functioning,

academic performance, interpersonal behavior, and overall mental well-being. In educational settings, stress often arises from workload demands, performance expectations, administrative responsibilities, and time pressures. Anxiety may emerge from uncertainty, evaluation fear, academic competition, or personal challenges, while depression is frequently linked to prolonged emotional strain, lack of motivation, or perceived failure. Understanding these concerns within real-world contexts is essential for identifying the psychological needs of individuals engaged in teaching and learning roles.

Mental health observations made in clinical and academic units highlight that individuals experiencing anxiety, stress, or depression may exhibit symptoms such as persistent worry, irritability, low mood, reduced concentration, and sleep disturbances. These manifestations align with established psychological literature, which emphasizes the multidimensional nature of emotional disorders. Assessment tools such as case-history documentation, Mental Status Examination (MSE), and psychological tests provide valuable insight into the patterns, severity, and contributing factors associated with these emotions. Additionally, therapeutic practices such as Jacobson's Progressive Muscle Relaxation (JPMR) demonstrate practical strategies for managing physiological tension and emotional distress.

Given the increasing mental health burden in academic settings, studying anxiety, stress, and depression among both academicians and students is crucial for promoting psychological well-being and designing appropriate support systems. The present cross-sectional study aims to explore the manifestations, contributing factors, and observed patterns of these emotional concerns based on experiences documented in clinical and academic environments. By examining how individuals express and cope with emotional distress, the study provides meaningful insight into the mental health needs prevalent within academic communities.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Stress, anxiety, and depression have been widely studied due to their significant impact on mental health, academic performance, and overall functioning among both academicians and students. These emotional conditions are known to influence concentration, productivity, motivation, and interpersonal relationships, making them major concerns within educational environments.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined stress as a psychological response arising when perceived demands exceed available coping resources. Their transactional model emphasizes that individuals in academic settings—where workload, deadlines, and performance expectations are high—are especially vulnerable to stress. Such stress frequently co-occurs with anxiety and depressive symptoms, affecting functioning in classroom and professional roles.

Beck, Emery, and Greenberg (1985) conceptualized anxiety as a state marked by excessive worry, apprehension, and physiological arousal. Their cognitive model suggests that anxious individuals exhibit heightened sensitivity to academic evaluation, fear of failure, and difficulty regulating thoughts. Observations of academicians and students in real settings provide opportunities to recognize cognitive distortions, behavioral avoidance, and emotional over-reactivity characteristic of anxiety.

Depression has also been a major focus of psychological research. The **World Health Organization (2017)** describes depression as a disorder involving persistent sadness, loss of interest, and impaired functioning. **Nolen-Hoeksema (2000)** emphasized the role of rumination—repetitive negative thinking—in maintaining depressive symptoms, a pattern often seen in individuals coping with academic pressure, self-doubt, or prolonged stress.

Jacobson (1938) introduced Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR), demonstrating its effectiveness in reducing physiological tension and emotional distress. Later work by **Conrad and Roth (2007)** supported the use of relaxation-based interventions such as JPMR for managing anxiety and stress, making them valuable techniques in both clinical and academic stress-management contexts.

Marlatt and Witkiewitz (2002) highlighted the effectiveness of structured therapeutic and rehabilitation programs in improving coping strategies and emotional regulation. Their findings reinforce the importance of providing support systems for individuals experiencing significant stress or mood-related difficulties, including those within academic communities.

Overall, the reviewed literature indicates that stress, anxiety, and depression are prevalent emotional concerns among academicians and students. Understanding these conditions through structured observation and assessment enhances professional competence, strengthens psychological insight, and supports the need for effective mental health interventions in educational environments. The present study draws upon these findings to examine patterns of emotional distress within academic settings.

III. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study employs a cross-sectional research design to explore patterns of anxiety, stress, and depression among academicians and students. The design enables the examination of emotional concerns across different groups at a single point in time, allowing for comparison and descriptive analysis.

Statement of the Problem

—A cross-sectional study on anxiety, stress, and depression among academicians (teaching and non-teaching) and students.

Operational Definitions

- **Stress:** A psychological response characterized by tension, emotional strain, or difficulty coping with academic or professional demands.
- **Anxiety:** A state of apprehension marked by worry, fear of evaluation, and physiological arousal.
- **Depression:** A persistent emotional condition involving sadness, hopelessness, reduced interest, and impaired functioning.
- **Academicians:** Individuals engaged in teaching, supervision, or academic administration in educational institutions.
- **Students:** Individuals enrolled in academic programs at undergraduate or postgraduate levels.

Need and Significance of the Study

Given the increasing mental health challenges in academic settings, it is essential to understand the emotional difficulties faced by both academicians and students. Identifying patterns of anxiety, stress, and depression helps institutions develop effective support programs, promote well-being, and enhance learning environments. The study also contributes to existing literature by providing real-world observations derived from clinical and academic settings.

Variables

- **Independent Variable:** Group category (Academicians and Students)
- **Dependent Variables:**
 - Anxiety
 - Stress
 - Depression

Objectives

- To examine the presence and patterns of anxiety, stress, and depression among academicians and students.
- To compare emotional symptoms across academic roles.
- To identify factors contributing to emotional distress in academic settings.
- To observe how assessment procedures help in understanding these psychological concerns.

Sample

The sample includes academicians and students observed across clinical and academic units such as:

- Academic Unit – Mohamed Sathak Engineering College.
- Psychology and Psychiatry Departments – Government Hospital context.
- Individuals presenting with emotional concerns such as worry, low mood, stress, or academic pressure.
- The sample reflects a real-world population experiencing academic or emotional strain.

Instrument

- Case history format
- Mental Status Examination (MSE)
- Psychological assessments related to anxiety and emotional functioning
- Observational notes
- Jacobson's Progressive Muscle Relaxation (JPMR) as a therapeutic technique

**Observed Progress
Learning Outcomes from Counseling**

Emotional Awareness

The client learned:

- Her feelings of fear and confusion are natural during major life changes.
- Wanting companionship and stability is valid and healthy.

Cognitive Restructuring

She identified negative beliefs such as:

- —Society will never accept me. |
- —Remarrying makes me a bad mother. | Through therapy, she reframed them as:
- —My happiness matters for my child’s well-being too. |
- —I deserve a second chance in life. |

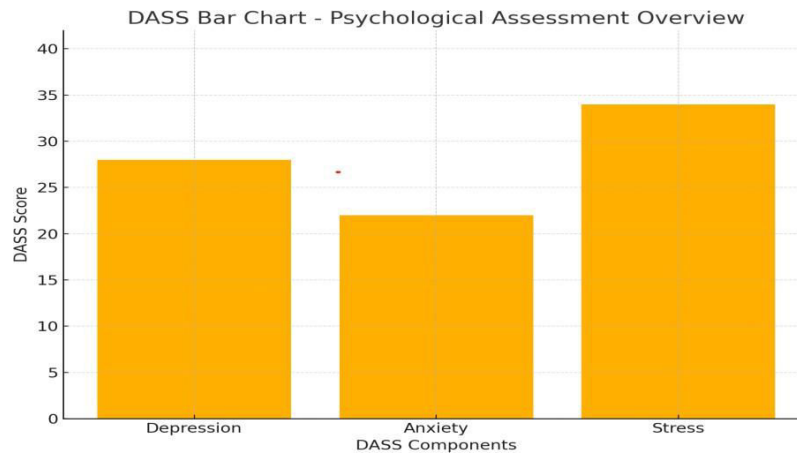
Self-Empowerment

- Recognize her right to make autonomous life choices
- Rebuild self-esteem
- Develop confidence in decision-making

Coping & Stress Management

- Relaxation breathing techniques
- Positive affirmations
- Problem-solving strategies
- Emotional journaling

Area	Before Counselling	After Counselling
Emotional Stability	Very Low	Improving
Self-Expression	Suppressed	More Open
Self-Worth	Poor	Emerging
Stress Level	Severe	Moderate
Hopefulness	Minimal	Slowly Restoring



Procedure

The study involved documenting behavioral, emotional, and cognitive indicators of anxiety, stress, and depression observed in both academicians and students. Case histories, MSE findings, and psychological assessments were reviewed to understand how emotional concerns manifest across academic roles. Therapeutic sessions such as JPMR were observed to identify strategies for managing emotional distress. All observations were compiled and analyzed descriptively to identify common patterns and contributing factors.

IV. RESULT

The findings of the present cross-sectional study indicate that both academicians and students exhibit notable patterns of anxiety, stress, and depression, although the intensity and expression of symptoms differ across groups. Observations revealed that academicians commonly showed stress related to workload, administrative responsibilities, and performance expectations, whereas students frequently demonstrated anxiety associated with academic pressure, examinations, and uncertainties about future outcomes. Depressive features such as low mood, reduced motivation, and concentration difficulties were observed in both groups, though often more pronounced in students managing academic transitions. Assessment procedures—including case histories, Mental Status Examinations (MSE), and psychological tests—helped identify cognitive, behavioral, and emotional indicators of distress. Relaxation-based interventions such as Jacobson's Progressive Muscle Relaxation (JPMR) were found to reduce physiological tension and improve emotional stability. Overall, the observed patterns highlight the prevalence and variability of emotional distress within academic environments.

V. DISCUSSION

The results support existing literature indicating that academic environments contribute significantly to emotional distress among both teachers and learners. High expectations, constant evaluations, and role demands appear to contribute to elevated stress in academicians, while performance pressure, competitive environments, and academic uncertainty heighten anxiety among students. These findings align with the models proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and Beck et al. (1985), which describe how cognitive appraisal and perceived demands influence emotional responses. Depressive symptoms identified during observations also reflect existing research describing the cumulative effect of stress and anxiety on mood functioning. The use of therapeutic techniques such as JPMR demonstrated that structured coping strategies can help regulate emotional states, supporting previous findings by Jacobson (1938) and Conrad and Roth (2007). The discussion suggests that academic institutions should prioritize emotional well-being, as both academicians and students show vulnerability to psychological distress that may affect performance, motivation, and overall functioning.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that anxiety, stress, and depression are common emotional concerns among academicians and students, though the sources and expression of distress vary between the two groups. Through systematic observation and assessment, meaningful insight was gained into the behavioral, cognitive, and emotional patterns associated with these conditions. The findings emphasize the importance of early identification, supportive interventions, and mental health awareness within academic institutions. Strengthening coping strategies and promoting psychological resilience may contribute to improved well-being and academic functioning. The study reinforces the need for holistic approaches that address both professional and academic pressures.

VII. LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations to this study that should be noted.

1. The study is based on observational data rather than standardized measurement tools, which may limit the precision of findings.
2. The sample is restricted to academicians and students encountered within specific clinical and academic settings, reducing generalizability.
3. Emotional symptoms were interpreted qualitatively, and severity levels could not be quantified.
4. The cross-sectional design does not allow for long-term tracking of emotional changes over time.
5. Variability in individual coping styles and personal histories may have influenced symptom presentation, but these factors were not controlled.

VIII. SUGGESTIONS

Based on the limitations of this study, some suggestions for further studies are

1. Future studies may expanding the sample across multiple academic institutions could improve generalizability.
2. Longitudinal studies are recommended to examine changes in emotional distress over time.
3. Universities and colleges should incorporate structured mental health programs, including relaxation training and counselling support.
4. Regular workshops on coping strategies and emotional management could help both academicians and students build resilience.
5. Creating open communication channels within academic settings may reduce stress arising from workload and performance pressure.

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