



## **EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DISSERTATION STRESS AND JOB SEEKING ANXIETY AMONGST POSTGRADUATE'S STUDENTS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The present study aims to evaluate the levels of perceived stress and anxiety among individuals using standardized psychometric tools—the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI). The research adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional design with data collected through an online Google Form questionnaire. A total of 127 responses were analyzed to assess symptoms related to stress and anxiety, and to explore the relationship between psychological distress and demographic variables. Findings from the PSS indicated that a significant number of participants experienced moderate to high levels of stress, often influenced by their ability to handle life's unpredictable and overwhelming circumstances. Results from the BAI revealed that common symptoms such as nervousness, fear, and difficulty in breathing were prevalent, with a considerable number reporting moderate to severe levels of anxiety. The study concludes that stress and anxiety are widespread across age and occupation groups, emphasizing the need for structured mental health support systems and coping strategies. Recommendations include implementing awareness programs, promoting lifestyle changes, and integrating psychological counseling at educational and workplace levels.

**Keywords:** Perceived Stress, Anxiety, Mental Health, Beck Anxiety Inventory, Stress Scale, Psychological Assessment, Coping Strategies.



## INTRODUCTION

A crucial stage in a student's academic and career path, postgraduate study is sometimes accompanied by great pressures and difficulties. Among these, dissertation stress is one that most clearly burdens students psychologically and influences their general academic performance. Researching, writing, and defending a dissertation takes time and intellectual energy; thus, great degrees of self-discipline, drive, and resilience are needed. Concurrent with this, postgraduate students can experience job-related anxiety stemming from the strain of finding or keeping employment. The junction of these two pressures begs serious questions regarding students' mental health and their capacity to properly manage their obligations towards their studies and their jobs.

Considered among the most taxing times in a student's academic life is the dissertation phase. All of which need constant work and critical thought include significant research, data collecting, analysis, and writing. Time restrictions, excessive demands from managers, and self-imposed perfectionism cause stress among students rather commonly. The ambiguity around the dissertation process combined with fear of rejection or failure can cause stress that results in burnout, tiredness, and lower motivation. Furthermore, since dissertation work is mostly solo and calls for little planned classroom contact, many students battle emotions of loneliness. These elements lead to significant degrees of stress, which could affect pupils' general academic performance and emotional state.

Apart from academic pressure, postgraduate students also suffer from employment-related anxiety stemming from worries about job security, career opportunities, and financial stability. Many students choose postgraduate study in order to improve their employability and have a competitive advantage on the employment scene. Still, uncertainty about future job prospects, fierce competition, and unstable economy fuels worry and self-doubt. For students who currently work, juggling job obligations with dissertation deadlines might be taxing and cause more stress, which would lower general productivity. Students find it challenging to have a good work-life balance as their concern of failing to satisfy academic requirements or underperformance at their place of employment intensifies job anxiety.



## **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

A master's degree or higher is often thought of as an important stepping stone to a successful career, more responsibility, and higher rankings in one's field of study. Still, it presents a unique set of difficulties, especially with relation to employment anxiety and dissertation stress. Completing a postgraduate dissertation represents a demanding academic task needing careful time management, critical analysis, and plenty of research. Many postgraduate students at the same time balance job with academic obligations, either full-time individuals or part-time workers looking for financial security. The confluence of both these demands generates a complicated environment whereby stress from one area can greatly affect the other, therefore influencing students' general performance and well-being. For postgraduate students, thesis stress is a common issue as it entails several phases including subject selection, literature evaluation, data collecting, evaluation, and final submission. The demand for creativity, strong academic requirements, and supervisor expectations drives the stress even further. Common psychological obstacles that impede development and cause worry, irritation, and even burnout are procrastinating, perfectionistic, and self-doubting behaviour. Long-term academic stress has been linked, according to studies, to mental health problems like anxiety, depression, and impaired cognitive ability, therefore influencing students' academic performance.

Likewise, job anxiety is becoming more and more common among postgraduate students, especially in the very competitive employment market of nowadays. Many students seek more study in hopes of finding better jobs, yet worry and tension can result from unknown job placement, financial stability, and professional advancement. Those that work already have more difficulty juggling their job obligations with dissertation deadlines, which results in a work-study conflict. The anxiety of underperformance in any field can aggravate stress levels, therefore affecting academic and professional advancement. Though its major consequences for students' mental health as well as academic performance, the connection within dissertation stress and employment anxiety is an understudied field of research. Knowing this link will let colleges, companies, and mental health experts create focused treatments to assist postgraduate students in properly handling their workload. This study intends to shed light on how students could keep a good balance between their academic and professional obligations by spotting primary stresses and coping strategies, thereby enhancing their general well-being and output.



In the present educational and professional scene, when postgraduate students are under more pressure to succeed in both academics and the employment, this study is very pertinent. Students might have more chances to manage their time as remote study and flexible job schedules allow, but they also face particular pressures that call for greater research. The results of this study will add to the body of knowledge already in publication on occupational and academic stress and provide useful advice for companies, teachers, and students themselves to establish a more encouraging workplace and classroom.

### **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

- To assess the levels of perceived stress in individuals using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS).
- To measure the severity of anxiety symptoms using the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI).
- To identify patterns and correlations between demographic factors (age, gender, occupation, etc.) and stress/anxiety levels.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Dissatisfaction among doctoral candidates is influenced by factors such as stress and self-efficacy.**

(Ahad, 2021) The purpose of this study was to investigate whether or not doctoral candidates at Pakistan's University of the Punjab in Lahore reported higher levels of satisfaction with their dissertations as compared to those candidates who reported lower levels of stress and self-efficacy. This study involved 250 PhD students who were completing their dissertations. Three tools were utilized for data collection; the Perceived Stress Scale had an internal consistency value of 0.75 according to Cronbach's alpha, and the Dissertation Self-Efficacy Scale had an internal consistency value of 0.95. The results showed that PhD students had a high degree of self-efficacy when it came to structural tasks for their dissertations and reported low levels of stress. Overall, the dissertation procedure was well-received by doctoral students. Stress and anxiety were more prevalent in women than in men, however self-efficacy and contentment were similar across the sexes. A statistically significant difference in dissertation completion



rates and non-completion rates were found in the study. Stress and both of those factors were negatively correlated, while self-efficacy and satisfaction were positively correlated. High dissertation satisfaction was more likely to be reported by students who expressed high levels of self-efficacy and low levels of stress.

**(Bhavni, 2023)** There are a lot of obstacles that students facing a Doctoral or Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree face. In this literature study, we looked at how PhD students deal with stress. After searching four databases, nine papers were determined to be eligible for inclusion in the review. Findings were analyzed by topic synthesis, which included qualitative research in the review. In the section on stresses, four main themes emerged Disconnection from friends and family Academic and institutional support, personal characteristics and self-perception, and difficulties and unknowns. The following topics were found to be related to coping: University resources, Personal techniques, Seeking and feeling supported, and Organizational issues. The results highlight the significance of social support for doctorate and PhD students, as well as possibilities for this to happen while they study. It is also important to provide help in developing practical and organizational abilities.

**(Silinda, 2016)** Postgraduate students, especially those pursuing their degrees through remote learning, may find the process of writing their dissertations or theses to be a particularly trying and demanding time. Seven hundred forty-eight postgraduate students at a university in South Africa who were working on their dissertations or theses participated in this mixed-methods study by taking an online stress-reduction survey. Both quantitative and qualitative data pointed to two main causes of stress: 1) not knowing what to expect from the research/writing process and not having enough help from supervisors, and 2) having trouble managing one's time effectively. There was a less correlation between general stress and problems with relationships, health, and money. University postgraduate programs that use distant learning might benefit their students, according to the results, by providing individualized instruction or counselling on topics like time management and juggling job and family obligations. In order to make sure that distance learning postgraduate students receive the guidance they need when writing their dissertation or thesis, supervisors should improve their ways of helping students, such as keeping in regular contact with students, providing feedback faster, and making correspondence clearer.

**Graduate nursing students suffer greatly from worry and stress related to their jobs.**

(Ling, 2023). The mental health of future nurses could benefit from studies that investigate the connections between these elements. The research model was tested using structural equation modelling and multiple regression on a sample of 321 graduate nursing students in this study. State-Trait Anxiety Scale, Social Support Rating Scale, Psychological Capital Scale, and Clinician Work Stress Scale were the instruments utilized to survey the participants in the study. Job stress was shown to have a significant correlation, according to the correlation analysis. Anxiety was shown to be substantially linked with psychological. According to the path analysis, psychological capital and social support were found to mediate the relationship between job stress and anxiety. Social support had a value of 0.07 (95% CI: 0.02-0.15), and psychological capital had a value of 0.21 (95% CI: 0.19-0.39). Anxiety and stress in clinical social work are closely related in postgraduate nursing students. The intermediate benefits of social support and psychological capital considerably decrease anxiety.

(Dixon, 2022) In order to gain a deeper appreciation for the realities faced by women suffering from clinical anxiety while completing a master's thesis. Setting the Scene: Disruptions to everyday functioning and quality of life can be caused by serious mental health concerns known as anxiety disorders. Writing a thesis might amplify the already high rates of anxiety in Aotearoa/New Zealand, particularly among women. Anxiety and its negative impacts are common among postgraduate thesis students, according to prior research. Despite this, there is a lack of data on how anxiety disorders affect women's capacity to finish research these and other higher education requirements, as well as how study procedures and programs may exacerbate these problems. Approach: Using purposive sampling techniques, we enrolled eight female students at a university in New Zealand who reported suffering from clinical anxiety and were either in the midst of or had already finished a master's thesis. To gather information, we utilized semi-structured interviews together with timelines that participants made themselves. In order to get deep understanding of the participants' lived experiences while they worked on their theses, the interview transcripts were subjected to Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Conclusions: After analyzing the interview data, three overarching themes emerged. The first topic, "Internal 'baggage' is activated in the thesis journey," showed how participants' pre-existing inclinations and certain personality traits were



brought to the surface throughout the thesis journey, making an already difficult process much more so. The second overarching topic, "The thesis as a catalyst for anxiety," drew attention to particular parts of the research process that participants cited as major sources of stress and anxiety. In the third subject, "Human connection—The people along the way make the difference," the participants' support networks and structures were detailed. This overarching topic allowed for an examination of the specific aspects of those resources that contributed to their reduced anxiety levels throughout the thesis writing process. Results: Writing a thesis is a particularly difficult task for women who suffer from clinical anxiety, according to this study. This study shows that writing a thesis can make students more anxious, which can affect their performance and overall health. It emphasizes the need for universities to provide specialized support to both students and supervisors so that women with clinical anxiety can succeed in college. Important suggestions for future study and an outline of the resources and assistance that institutions may offer to improve the student experience for this demographic are included in the thesis's conclusion.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study paper methodology uses a mixed-method approach to thoroughly examine the complex issues faced by post graduate students, as well as the solutions and support systems designed to help them to cope. This methodology integrates qualitative and quantitative techniques to provide a comprehensive comprehension of the subject matter.

Initially, a comprehensive examination of the literature was done to learn more about the effect of dissertation stress and job seeking anxiety amongst post graduate students. Analyzing material on stress and anxiety looked through peer-reviewed journal, books, government paper, Ngo publication and internet sources. Quantitative information was gathered via google form questionnaire that was given to post graduate students who were facing dissertation stress and job seeking anxiety. Standard questionnaire was used to collect data.

**Aim-** This chapter outlines the research design and methodology employed in the present study. It explains the tools used for data collection, the sampling method, the demographic profile of the respondents, and the statistical techniques used for data analysis. The



methodology adopted has been designed to ensure the accuracy, reliability, and validity of the findings.

### **Research Design**

The research follows a quantitative, cross-sectional design to analyze the levels of stress and anxiety experienced by individuals from various age groups and backgrounds. This approach is most suitable for studies that aim to capture current psychological states across a sample population within a specific time frame.

### **Sampling Method**

This study employed non-probability convenience sampling as its sampling technique. Based on their availability and desire to complete the survey, participants were selected. The sample consisted of individuals aged 18 and above from various educational, professional, and social backgrounds.

### **Sample Size**

A total of 127 participants responded to the questionnaire. The responses were collected and screened for completeness, and the final analysis was conducted using valid responses.

### **Tools for Data Collection**

To collect reliable and standardized data, two psychological scales were used:

- **Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)**

The Perceived Stress Scale, created by Cohen and colleagues in 1983, is one of the most popular psychological tools for assessing stress perception. In the PSS, questions are asked concerning thoughts and feelings over the past month. The scale is intended to assess how stressful a person perceives certain circumstances in their life. Ten things total are scored on a 5-point Likert scale, with the range being "Never" to "Very Often".

- **Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI)**

Anxiety levels in adults and adolescents are measured using Aaron T. Beck's Beck Anxiety Inventory. Twenty-one entries explain common physical and psychological signs of anxiety.



Respondents are given a 4-point rating system to indicate how much each symptom has troubled them over the previous week, with "Not at all" being the lowest number" to "Severely – it bothered me a lot".

### **Method of Data Collection**

The data was collected through a self-administered Google Form questionnaire, which was circulated digitally via social media platforms and email. Respondents were informed about the reason of the ponder, and assent was gotten earlier to support. The secrecy of the members was kept up all through the method.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

After collecting the responses, data was exported to Microsoft Excel for cleaning and analysis. The responses were then represented through percentage analysis and graphical tools such as bar charts and pie charts to visualize the distribution of stress and anxiety symptoms.

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

This segment points of interest the discoveries from the investigation of the information accumulated from a standardized questionnaire that evaluated the participants' subjective reports of their physical and mental health issues. Each response has been assigned a severity level: "Not at all," "Mildly," "Moderately," and "Severely." The study provides valuable insights on the frequency and severity of symptoms experienced by the participants, including restlessness, lightheadedness, fear, and other signs of worry. We can learn more about the patterns and effects of these symptoms by tabulating and interpreting the results.

The study provides a comprehensive overview of the stress and anxiety experienced by postgraduate students, based on responses from 127 participants collected through standardized tools—the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI). Demographic data revealed that a majority of respondents were between 18 and 25 years old, with a balanced gender representation and a mix of undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate participants. This diverse sample allowed for a nuanced understanding of how academic and life pressures affect students at various stages of their educational journey.



In terms of stress-related findings, many students reported feeling emotionally overwhelmed by unexpected events and a persistent sense of lacking control over important aspects of life. A significant proportion—over two-thirds—experienced frequent nervousness and stress, while more than half admitted to feeling unable to cope with all their responsibilities at least some of the time. These stressors were compounded by feelings of helplessness and a sense that things were not going their way, suggesting that a considerable number of students were struggling to maintain emotional balance. On a positive note, many students also expressed confidence in handling personal problems and managing irritations, which indicates that while stress is prevalent, some students are actively employing coping strategies.

Anxiety-related symptoms, as measured by the BAI, further emphasized the mental health challenges faced by postgraduate students. Physical symptoms such as numbness, dizziness, heart palpitations, face flushing, and trembling were commonly reported, with nearly half of the respondents experiencing these symptoms at moderate to severe levels. Emotional symptoms, including fear of the worst happening, inability to relax, and feeling terrified or scared, were also widespread, highlighting the deep psychological toll of academic and career pressures. Particularly concerning were the experiences of catastrophic thinking and fear of losing control, which affected a significant number of participants. While some symptoms such as fear of dying and choking were less commonly reported at severe levels, their presence in moderate forms still points to underlying anxiety patterns that could escalate if left unaddressed.

Overall, the data reveals a high prevalence of both psychological and somatic symptoms of stress and anxiety among postgraduate students. These findings underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions such as accessible counseling services, stress management workshops, peer support programs, and mindfulness-based activities. Addressing these issues proactively can help students manage their emotional well-being more effectively and navigate the academic journey with greater resilience and confidence.

## **DISCUSSION**

The research paper presents several strengths that contribute to its credibility and relevance in understanding the psychological well-being of postgraduate students. One of the major



strengths of the study is its use of standardized and widely accepted psychometric tools—the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI). These tools enhance the reliability and validity of the data by providing a structured and scientifically tested framework for assessing stress and anxiety symptoms. Another strength is the comprehensiveness of the data analysis, which includes both emotional and physical indicators of psychological distress. By capturing a wide range of symptoms and examining them across various demographic groups, the study offers an in-depth understanding of the mental health challenges faced by students during their dissertation phase and job-seeking period. Additionally, the use of visual aids such as charts and tables improves the clarity and accessibility of the results, allowing for better interpretation by readers and stakeholders. The sample size of 127 participants, though modest, is adequate for a small-scale cross-sectional study and includes a diverse representation in terms of age, gender, and educational background, adding to the inclusivity and relevance of the findings.

However, the study also presents some notable weaknesses. One of the primary limitations is its reliance on self-reported data, which may be influenced by social desirability bias or the participants' subjective perceptions. Since the participants were not clinically diagnosed by mental health professionals, the findings reflect perceived symptoms rather than confirmed psychological conditions, which may affect the accuracy of the conclusions drawn. The results' limited capacity to be applied to a larger population is another drawback of the non-probability convenience sampling technique. Additionally, the cross-sectional design of the study only records data at one moment in time, making it difficult to determine causal linkages or evaluate changes in stress and anxiety over time. The study is also geographically limited, as most responses were collected through online platforms, potentially excluding individuals from rural areas or those without internet access. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights and lays a strong foundation for future research and interventions aimed at improving the mental health of postgraduate students.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

**Self-Reported Data:** The study relied on self-reported questionnaires (PSS and BAI), which may be subject to response bias or social desirability bias, affecting the accuracy of the results.



**Limited Sample Size:** With only 127 participants, the findings may not be fully generalizable to the larger population, especially in diverse cultural or socio-economic contexts.

**Cross-Sectional Design:** The study was only done once, which makes it difficult to establish a causal link between stress and anxiety.

**Lack of Clinical Diagnosis:** Participants were not clinically assessed by mental health professionals; therefore, the study reflects perceived symptoms rather than medically diagnosed conditions.

**Geographical Limitations:** Most responses were collected from a specific region or via online platforms, which may exclude participants without internet access or from rural backgrounds.

## PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS

- **Mental Health Awareness Programs:** Organizing workshops, seminars, and webinars in schools, colleges, and workplaces to educate individuals about stress and anxiety, early signs, and coping strategies.
- **Incorporation of Counseling Services:** Institutions should provide access to certified counselors or psychologists for regular mental health check-ins and support services.
- **Mindfulness and Relaxation Training:** Integrating mindfulness practices such as meditation, deep breathing, and yoga into daily routines to help individuals manage stress and reduce anxiety.
- **Peer Support Groups:** Encouraging the formation of peer-led support groups where individuals can share experiences and learn from one another in a safe, non-judgmental environment.
- **Time Management and Lifestyle Coaching:** Providing training on time management, work-life balance, and healthy lifestyle habits like proper sleep, diet, and exercise to reduce stressors.
- **Mobile and Digital Health Tools:** Promoting the use of mental wellness apps and online cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) platforms for self-monitoring and guided interventions.



## CONCLUSION

The current research set out to evaluate, in a representative sample of the community, the many different kinds of anxiety and stress-related physical and mental symptoms. Subjects rated their own experiences as either "not at all," "very mild," "moderately intense," or "very severely" for the purposes of the analysis. The subjects' emotional and physiological resilience in the face of adversity was captured in great detail by means of the structured questionnaire.

There was a high prevalence of symptoms like anxiety, restlessness, dread of the worst, and palpitations among the subjects, with many describing mild to severe pain. The prevalence of symptoms such as "Fear of worst happening" and "Unable to relax," which indicate increased psychological discomfort among respondents, stands out. Somatic indications of stress, including "Hands trembling," "Feeling hot," and "Wobbliness in legs," were also noted.

"Fear of dying" and "Difficulty in breathing" are symptoms that were reported less often in severe categories, but their existence in moderate forms suggests that the population possesses underlying anxiety reactions. Furthermore, the results show that many individuals still encountered symptoms to a moderate or low degree, even when they were not experiencing them significantly. This indicates that stress has a widespread and long-lasting effect on daily functioning.

Findings from this study add together to show how critical it is to have resources to help people cope with stress and their mental health. They also stress the significance of spotting symptoms of severe or chronic anxiety early on and intervening before it's too late. In order to improve mental health, communities, schools, and businesses must join forces to raise awareness, provide counselling, and encourage stress-relieving practices like yoga, meditation, and deep breathing.

The results of this study add to the increasing amount of research that highlights the mental and physiological effects of stress. It provides helpful information for healthcare providers, lawmakers, and educators who are trying to find ways to alleviate stress and improve people's quality of life.



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