



## Research Paper: Chronic Anxiety in Medical Students at Balkh University



Seyed Aminullah Nasrat<sup>\*1</sup>, Qais Raheen<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ph.D. Graduate of Agronomy, Faculty of Medicine, Balkh University, Balkh, Afghanistan

<sup>2</sup> Associate Professor, Faculty of Medicine, Balkh University, Balkh, Afghanistan

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### Abstract

**Subjective:** Anxiety is a negative emotional state caused by confronting unfavorable and unmanageable situations. Starting university and facing a new setting often triggers anxiety in students, particularly those who anticipate a demanding work environment.

**Methods:** The study is a descriptive-analytical research conducted in 2023 on the students of Balkh University Faculty of Medicine. A sample size of 120 students was chosen using the basic random sampling approach. Data was collected using Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI). Descriptive and inferential statistics were applied for data analysis using SPSS 27. Out of 120 participants, 52 were aged 20-25, 38 were aged 25-30, and 30 were aged 30-35. Out of the respondents, 62 resided in dormitories and the remaining 58 lived in individual residences.

**Results:** Out of 120 students, 56 had normal anxiety levels, 35 had mild anxiety, 12 had moderate anxiety, 8 had severe anxiety, and 9 had extremely severe anxiety.

**Conclusion:** Therefore, psychologists in student counseling centers should pay attention to reducing the level of anxiety in students and study the reasons for its occurrence.

### \* Corresponding author:

Seyed Aminullah Nasrat

**Address:** Faculty of Medicine, Balkh University, Balkh, Afghanistan

**Tel:** +93 (070) 051 0070

**E-mail:** [sanasrat291@gmail.com](mailto:sanasrat291@gmail.com)



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## Introduction

Youth are a nation's primary asset, and the transition to university is a critical phase marked by significant shifts in their social and interpersonal dynamics. Students should not only be professionals in many subjects but also play a crucial role in future country government. In the future, students will have a role in educating future generations, contributing to the improvement of society (Najafi Kalyani et al., 2012).

Mental health is a crucial aspect of students' well-being, given their role as the future architects of the nation. This group experiences high levels of stress as a result of their age and unique social circumstances. Factors including homesickness, family separation, adjusting to a new environment, academic challenges, competitiveness with peers and concerns about future career can cause stress and anxiety among students (Najafi Kalyani et al., 2012).

Anxiety is the negative emotional state resulting from facing adverse and unmanageable circumstances in humans, a common experience that significantly impacts human health. One issue in higher education is the challenge of students experiencing anxiety, which can be overwhelming for many students (Soltanifar et al., 2010). Research indicates that stress, anxiety, and depression are prevalent psychological issues among medical students. Medical students often experience significant pressure at various stages of their education (Shamsaei et al., 2018). Anxiety has been found to have a significant impact on learning. It is associated with many bodily

problems and failures that persist and cannot be eradicated. Anxiety can lead to the activation of the sympathetic nervous system at varying levels, as shown by the body's physiology (Soltanifar et al., 2010).

Anxiety is a reaction to an ambiguous threat, characterized by feelings of uncertainty and worry related to an unknown source of risk. Anxiety is a prevalent and unpleasant feeling accompanied by bodily sensations such as shortness of breath, palpitations, headache, or restlessness (Ghashghaee et al., 2020). Anxiety can be viewed as a good response as it enhances the significance and urgency of critical tasks, motivating individuals to take action and facilitate progress and development. Anxiety becomes problematic when it manifests in response to innocuous stimuli or occurrences, or presents as an irrational dread of inadequacy in performing tasks (Ghashghaee et al., 2020). According to the stated content, the purpose of this research is to investigate the level of anxiety in medical students of Balkh University.

Soltanifar et al. (2010) conducted a study to examine anxiety symptoms in medical and physiotherapy students at Mashhad University of Medical Sciences. The research was a cross-sectional descriptive study involving medical and physiotherapy students. 150 female medical and physiotherapy students were randomly chosen and assessed using Spielberger's anxiety questionnaire. Students with a history of significant stressors such as the loss of family members, severe medical conditions, divorce, or accidents were not included in the study. Thus, the sample size was restricted to

136. The findings were examined using SPSS and statistical tests including Chi-square, Exact test, and Kruskal-Wallis test. Female medical students had higher levels of stress and anxiety symptoms compared to physiotherapy students, as indicated by the data. Hence, it is crucial to focus on the mental well-being and alleviate the stressors affecting these individuals (Soltanifar et al., 2010).

Backović et al. (2013) conducted a study on stress and mental health among medical school students. A cross-sectional study was carried out on 367 fourth-year students at the Faculty of Medicine in Belgrade. The study utilized a questionnaire that covered demographic-social information, self-reported health state, and the stressful impact of academic activities. The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) was used to assess health status. More than 50% of students experience frequent mental anxiety, while one third of them suffer from insomnia, according to the research. Almost half of the pupils rated the general stress level as moderate or high. Backović et al. (2013) found that 63.1% of exams were perceived as highly stressful.

Pelletier et al. (2016) conducted a study on stress, health risk behaviors, and weight in community college students. Their research aims to analyze the correlation between stress, weight-related health risk behaviors (such as eating habits, physical activity, sedentary behavior, sleep patterns, smoking, and excessive drinking), and weight status among enrolled students to prevent weight gain, utilizing cross-sectional data. The study

revealed a correlation between increased stress levels and a greater occurrence of overweight or obesity (Pelletier et al., 2016).

Ramón-Arbués et al. (2020) undertook a study to investigate the prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress among students and the factors associated with them. The research sample comprised 1074 pupils. The study revealed a moderate occurrence of depressive symptoms (18.4%), anxiety symptoms (23.6%), and stress symptoms (34.5%) in the population under investigation. Problem behavior in using the Internet, smoking, insomnia, and low self-esteem were directly linked to feelings of depression, anxiety, and stress (Ramón-Arbués et al., 2020).

Lemay et al. (2019) did a study titled "Yo Impact of a Yoga and Meditation Intervention on Students' Stress and Anxiety Levels." Their research was to assess the impact of a six-week yoga and meditation program on stress perception, anxiety levels, and mindfulness abilities of college students who took part in a pilot program consisting of a 60-minute yoga class and guided meditation. The entity received training from faculty members at the University of Rhode Island Institute of Pharmacy. The students completed questionnaires both before and after the intervention to assess the household. The questionnaire assessed three variables: 1) anxiety level, 2) stress, and 3) mindfulness skills. Students had decreased stress and anxiety levels following a six-week yoga and meditation program before to final exams, as indicated by the results. Research findings indicate that engaging in mindfulness

activities once a week can lower stress and anxiety levels in students (Lemay et al., 2019).

Quek et al. (2019) conducted a study on the worldwide occurrence of anxiety in medical students. The research aimed to examine the frequency of anxiety in medical students and characteristics associated with anxiety in this population. A study was carried out with 40348 medical students, and the data was examined post-collection. Anxiety was shown to be more prevalent among medical students hailing from the Middle East and Asia. No significant variation in anxiety prevalence was found depending on gender and subject analysis. Approximately one-third of medical students globally experience anxiety at a rate far higher than the general population (Quek et al., 2019).

Shamsuddin et al. (2013) conducted a study on the relationship between depression, anxiety, and stress among university students in Malaysia. This study was a cross-sectional analysis including 506 students between the ages of 18 and 24 from four public universities in Malaysia. The data were assessed using a questionnaire gathered through the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21). Results indicated that 27.5% of students experienced moderate depression, while 9.7% experienced severe or extremely severe depression. 34% experienced moderate anxiety, whereas 29% experienced severe anxiety according to Shamsuddin et al. (2013).

Aloufi et al. (2021) did a study titled "Reducing stress, anxiety and depression in

undergraduate nursing students: Systematic review." This study involved bachelor's degree nurses and assessed interventions aimed at reducing stress and anxiety. The review encompassed empirical investigations conducted between 2008 and 2018. A total of 1579 studies were identified through a systematic search, of which 931 were reviewed based on the title and abstract. 44 studies were evaluated, and 22 were selected for the systematic review after careful assessment. Aloufi et al. (2021) found a variety of effective therapies that address stress and anxiety in nursing students.

Freitas et al. (2023) did a study on the symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress in health students and their impact on the quality of life at Midwestern University. The data was gathered using a pre-designed questionnaire. A total of 448 questionnaires were provided, which comprised 21 items addressing depression, anxiety, and stress, and analyzing individual coping mechanisms and perceived barriers to mental health care. Almost one-third of the community reported severe depression (28.3%), anxiety (38.6%), and stress (31%) according to the findings. Consequently, there was a prevalence of mental health issues among professors, staff, and students (Freitas et al., 2023).

## Method

The present study is a descriptive-analytical research conducted in 2023 on the students of Balkh University Faculty of Medicine. A sample size of 120 individuals was chosen using the basic random sampling approach. Data was collected using the Back Anxiety

Inventory, consisting of 21 questions. Responses were rated on a 4-option scale. Descriptive and inferential statistics were applied for data analysis using SPSS 27.

Beck's anxiety Inventory.

Table 1 shows the severity of anxiety in

Table 1

The intensity of anxiety in the Beck Anxiety Inventory.

Severity of anxiety symptoms	Criterion
Normal anxiety	0-7
mild anxiety	8-9
Moderate anxiety	10-14
severe anxiety	15-19
Very severe anxiety	Over 20

The table above will be used to interpret the respondents' anxiety intensity scores.

Table (2) displays the demographics of students categorized by age group, place of residence, and academic year.

**Results**

Table 2

The descriptive statistics of students categorized by age group, location of residence, and academic year.

Variables		frequency	Percentage
age categories	20-25	52	43.4
	25-30	38	31.6
	30-35	30	25
Address	Dormitory	62	51.6
	private house	58	48.4
Academic year	2023	32	26.6
	2022	28	23.3
	2021	16	13.3
	2019	27	22.5
	2018	11	9.3
	2017	6	5

Out of 120 individuals, 52 were aged 20-25, 38 were aged 25-30, and 30 were aged 30-35. Table (3) displays the anxiety levels of students.

Table 3

The different levels of anxiety among students

Severity of anxiety symptoms	Frequency	Percentage
Normal anxiety	56	46.6
Mild anxiety	35	29.1
Moderate anxiety	12	10
Severe anxiety	8	6.6
Very severe anxiety	9	7.5

Out of 120 students, 56 had normal anxiety levels, 35 had mild anxiety, 12 had moderate anxiety, 8 had severe anxiety, and 9 had extremely severe anxiety.

### Conclusion

Anxiety is the state of experiencing undesirable and unmanageable conditions, which is commonly felt by all individuals and is significant for human health. One issue in higher education is the challenge of students experiencing anxiety, which can be overwhelming for many students (Soltanifar et al., 2010). As observed in this study, almost more than half of the students suffered from mild to very severe anxiety.

Research indicates that stress, anxiety, and depression are prevalent psychological issues among medical students and medical students often experience significant pressure at various points in their education (Shamsaei et al., 2018). Also, research indicates that worry and anxiety significantly impacts learning and can lead to physical issues and persistent failures (Soltanifar et al., 2010).

The reasons for anxiety in students can be related to various things. Adapting to a new educational environment, successfully passing courses and exams, socializing with

new people, challenges of living independently from the family, financial issues and entering a social environment larger than the family can be among the reasons for increasing anxiety in students.

Considering that anxiety is one of the problems of students, it is suggested that counseling centers in universities help to reduce their anxiety level by holding educational workshops and providing individual psychotherapies for students. Future researches can further examine the causes and areas of anxiety in students and determine some strategies to reduce anxiety in students.

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### Conflicts of Interest

No conflict of interest has been reported.

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