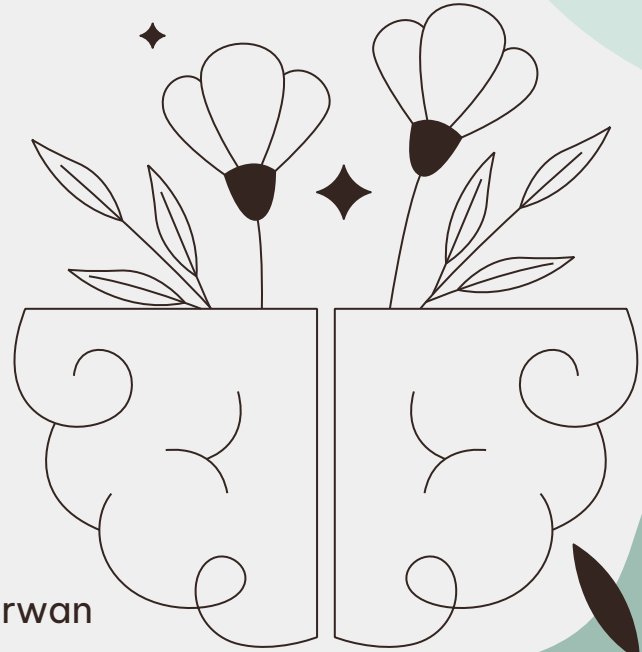


# Anxiety among Higher education Students

Problematic Context, Our  
Research & Complexity

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# Overview

- Stakeholders: Students, Professors, Counsellors, institution, etc.
- Complicated, multifaceted social, medical and institutional problem.
- No clear definition of the problem and its causes, accommodates diverse perspectives of different stakeholders.
- Wickedness- Academic pressure, social isolation, financial stress, and fear of individual with dynamic interaction.
- Highly resistant towards implementation for changes
- Obeys cognitive limitation of bounded rationality.

# Data Collection

- Primary data
  - Interviews
    - Students (7)
    - Counselors (1)
    - Professors (2)
  - Survey for students (75)
- Secondary Data
  - Research papers & articles were referred.
  - Base understanding & Questionnaire framing.
  - Useful in understanding possible current solutions and their viability.

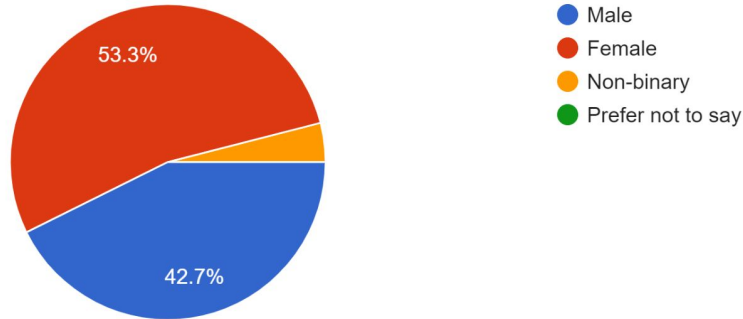
# Literature Review

- The urgent need to raise awareness among students and educators about available preventive measure to address severe academic anxiety, through seminar & workshops, is crucial for academic performance. [Rehman, A. U. (2016).]
- Health practitioners provide support, but students may also need individual assistance from lecturers or learning advisors, especially during times of heightened anxiety. [Stevenson, M. (2010)]
- the stigma associated with mental health is still a significant barrier for students, especially male students and students from ethnic and religious minorities to seek help for severe anxiety disorder treatment.
- Active participation in athletics and group activities can act as protective factor against SAD development.[Mofatteh, M. (2021)]

# Survey- Demographics

Gender

75 responses



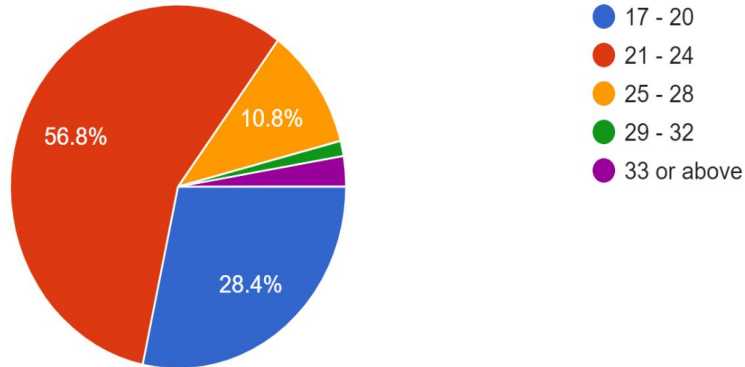
Fairly good gender ratio in our survey

# Survey- Demographics

Our sample majorly has participants from age group 21-24, followed by 17-20 age group

Age(in years)

74 responses

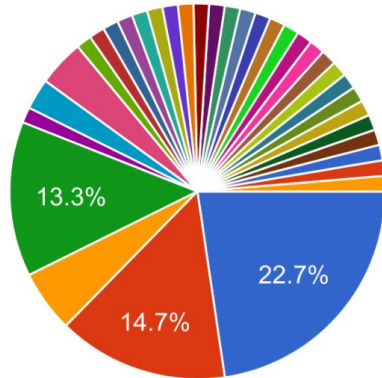


# Survey- Demographics

We have responses from people pursuing 30 different courses

Which course are you currently enrolled in?

75 responses



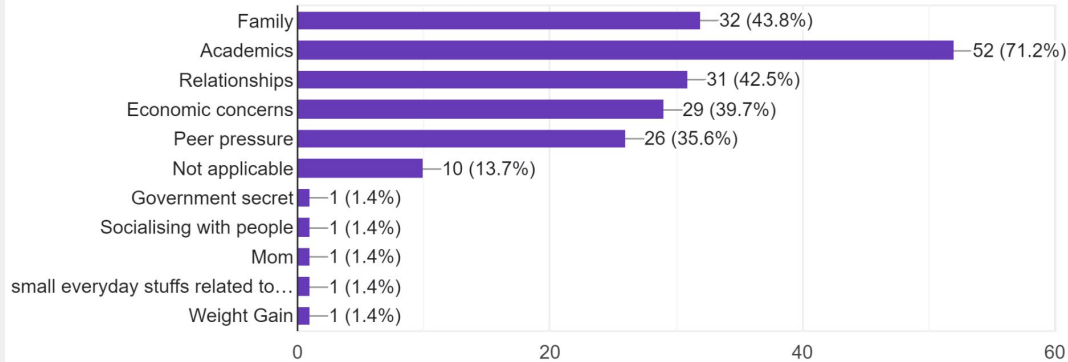
- iMTech
- MTech
- MS(by Research)
- M.Sc. Digital Society
- PhD
- Mba
- Bsc
- M.Sc zoology
- LL.B.
- Ba culinary arts
- B. Sc
- B.A.
- MSc Nutrition and dietitics
- Ilb
- Ma economics
- MBA
- BA
- BSC ZOOLOGY HO
- Mbbs
- Psychology
- Btech
- B tech
- BDS



# Survey Insights

Which factor contributes to most of your anxiety, if you have ever felt anxious? (Please select all that apply)

73 responses

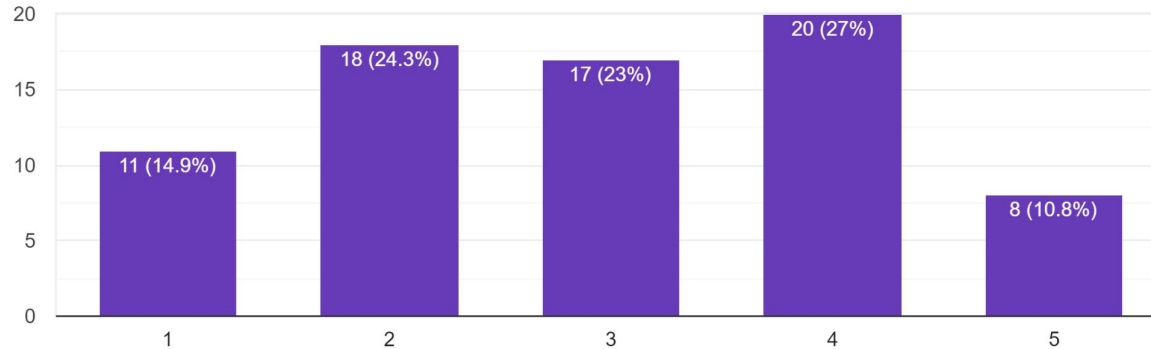


The major contributor of anxiety in our sample was-  
Academics, Family, Relationship, Economic Concerns  
and Peer Pressure

# Survey Insights

Faculty, administration and work culture of my institution contributes negatively to psychological well being of the students.

74 responses



The above graph signifies that students have varied responses as everyone has different psychological well being, the things creating negative impact for one could not be for other

# Survey Insights

Various definitions of anxiety, came in our survey are

When you feel like you are unable to fulfill a task in given time, that feeling of failure leads to anxiety.

a feeling that captures my heart, stops my breath and makes me numb

Anxiety is to stress for the study exam and more things

Feeling of restlessness, when u feel low, can't think of anything helpful, worried too much

I think one of the reason is genetics (family has history related to anxiety and depression) also not being able to do what I want to and managing expectations

# Prof. A (GGSIP University, Delhi)

## Its Prevalence

- Anxiety is more prevalent among students today than in the past.
- Social media and tools like ChatGPT is creating academic pressure and fear of failure.
- The lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, including social isolation and loss.

## Causes

- Academic pressure (exams, assignments, fear of failure)
- Social factors (homesickness, lack of social interaction, rejection)
- Future uncertainty (career decisions, financial pressure)

*"they do skip exams also because of fear of failure"*

*"social rejection in their personal lives, homesickness"*

*"career pressure of what to do after this semester"*

# Prof. A

## Impact on Academic Performance

- Skipping exams
- Lack of participation in class
- Decreased motivation and focus

*"they do skip exams also because of fear of failure"*

## Professor strategies to address

- Interactive teaching methods to encourage participation
- Providing opportunities for self-expression (presentations)
- Encouraging involvement in activities (events, workshops)

*"teaching pedagogy is interacting with students"*

*"every week, I take their presentations on Saturdays"*

# Prof. B (IIIT Bangalore)

## Understanding of Anxiety

- Enormously complex thing to understand for a person with no specialization in it. It can be traumatizing for the sufferers.
- It is different for different people and its triggerers are hard to anticipate & depends on individuals.

## Its Prevalence

- The frequency of related cases have increased, especially post-covid because of caused disruption in social practises in academia (Mode of attending exams and classes)
- Increased awareness and convenience to talk about mental health has also resulted in increased visibility of cases.
- To some extent it is also used as an excuse by students, making difficult for professors to distinguish.

# Prof. B

## Present Concerns Regarding Students Behaviour and Academic Performance.

- The frequency of interaction between students and professors have gone down due to degraded interpersonal skills, which makes it difficult for Prof. to be aware about students condition.
- Large class sizes can make it harder for instructors to identify struggling students.
- Anxiety can hinder academic performance of students

*“...So I don't know if that is because somehow there is some difficulty in communicating that to me on that entire communication etiquette was changed...”*

*“....when there is quiet, it's very hard to interpret silence beyond the point....”*

*“...The larger the class the less my ability to know anything about the student...”*

*“...there is no question it will definitely affect itself...”*

# Prof. B

## Requirements - Instructor's Role in Reducing anxiety

- Creating a supportive and encouraging classroom environment is effective.
- Clear communication about expectations & course structure.
- Providing opportunities for students to ask questions and seek clarification.
- Promoting active listening and peer support system.

*“...making it an interactive relationship where students don't feel intimidated...”*

*“...There are some general rules of thumb, I think laying out the timeline ahead of time can never hurt my chances....”*

*“...and then if you can't handle it, the only problem is that means we need communication.”*

*“...So be very open to listening, right And don't try to always be giving people advices...”*



# Counselor's Views

## Understanding of Anxiety

- Anxiety is a feeling of dread due to future insecurity, from thinking about things that are not in control. It is fear generated from overthinking of anticipated events (what will happen).

## Its prevalence

- The counselor observes a rise in anxiety due to post-pandemic concerns.
- Different socio-economic factors have contributed that includes students future employment prospects.

# Counselor's Views

## Current concerns

- Students hesitation to seek help is big barrier.
- Awareness - Students are unaware about their condition (recognisability issue) & think that anxiety symptoms will stay with them life long as their individual characteristic.
- Causes - Lack of support system, Negative social environment, Social media usage leading tendency of comparing self with others.

# Counselor's Views

## Recommendations

- Increasing awareness about the issue at self as well as community level.
- Preventive measures -
  - Building a personal support system through robust communication channel.
  - Self-management techniques for addressing doubts.
  - Meditation.
- Curative measures -
  - Effective diagnostic mechanism
  - Accessibility of professional consultation.

# Students Views

## Current Concern of Students

**Academic pressures:** deadlines, workload, exams, grades

*"Deadlines and workload take my energy... there's a requirement of all the time availability."*

*"The situation most of the times is regarding my studies, exam tensions, test scores..."*

**Group work:** unclear expectations, mismatched work styles, lack of cooperation, competition

*"Sometimes group work [causes anxiety] as work style doesn't match with other members."*

*"When in group work it's not cooperative but competitive, where excessive focus is on individual work."*

**Instructor behavior:** unclear communication, unloading anxiety on students

*"When instructors unload their anxiety on people [it triggers anxiety]."*

*"Very clear, give information on all deliverables... Don't give last minute surprises."*

**Social comparison:** public display of grades, competitiveness

*"Everybody knows everybody's roll number, so that is also drama only. And keeping courses, everyone's marks open..."* *"Social comparison... public display of grades, competitiveness..."*

# Students Views

## Current Systemic Issues

- Self predispositions – hopelessness towards improvement that prevent students not to take any measure at the first itself.  
*“...Even if it is a solution, I don't see it as a solution...If I start seeing watching movies as a solution, may be it will help, or may be it will not”*
- Confidentiality concerns – experiences of trust breach results in more conservative attitude of students.  
*“...I actually believed in them. But what they did was they called my parents that your son is the red stone or something following that assessment...and so I lost trust totally on your those.”*
- Great focus on Reactive Solutions and negligence of preventive measures.  
*“...Don't try to solve the problem after the problem has become... They want, like, quick solutions...”*

# Students Views

## Impact

- Negatively-
  - "When I'm anxious, I might read the paper twice or thrice and I still won't get anything." (impaired memory)
  - "I won't be able to retain it." (difficulty learning)
  - "I'm not able to give my 100%...it did impact my midterm exams." (decreased performance)
  - "When I'm anxious about the other subject, I am even wasting time at the present moment and not able to focus." (distraction and procrastination)
- Positively-
  - "For some sort of anxiety is compulsive. Like it pushes me to score better next time." (increased effort)
  - "Whenever I have some tests coming nearby and I'm anxious so I prepare more rigorously for that test." (better preparation)

**General insights-** Anxiety works differently based on the situation.

Anxiety hinders information processing and retention, leading to lower test scores. It also disrupts focus and time management, hindering current studies.

It motivates the person to put in extra effort and prepare more thoroughly for future tests.

# Students Views

## Coping Mechanisms

- "YouTuber who makes videos of his treks in Himalayas... I just love watching his videos. So on hard days, it's the same video, same set of 4-5 videos. I'll watch that. Just trekking videos..." (distraction with calming visuals)
- "Spotify, I'll play some Buddhist chants or something. So I have a whole playlist of these chants and I will listen to it and calm down. I also try to do box breathing." (relaxation techniques)
- "Whenever I feel anxious, I try to divert my mind by either doing singing or going to gym or sometimes reading novels." (engaging in hobbies)
- "One technique my brother told me was focus on your breathing... just focus on your breathing. That's all. Just count the breath that you are taking or just count your heartbeat." (mindfulness practices)
- "Meditating, just sitting down and relaxing. Not thinking about anything." (meditation)
- "I went back to reading books. I did whatever other than academics and social life I could do. Even playing chess for that matter." (engaging in enjoyable activities)

**General insights-** Students use a variety of strategies to manage anxiety, including distraction, relaxation techniques, engaging in hobbies, mindfulness practices, and meditation.

# Students Views

## Solution Suggestions

- **Feedback Mechanisms:** Truly anonymous course feedback systems (addressing student fear of reprisal) Regular feedback cycles throughout the semester (e.g., beginning, middle, end)
- **Mental Health Resources:** Easily accessible mental health groups on campus
- **Support Systems:** Mentorship programs that connect students with experienced advisors Buddy systems that pair younger students with older students
- **Recreational activities** -organized events to promote relaxation and social interaction for students



# Students Views

## Recommendations for a Systems-informed Approach

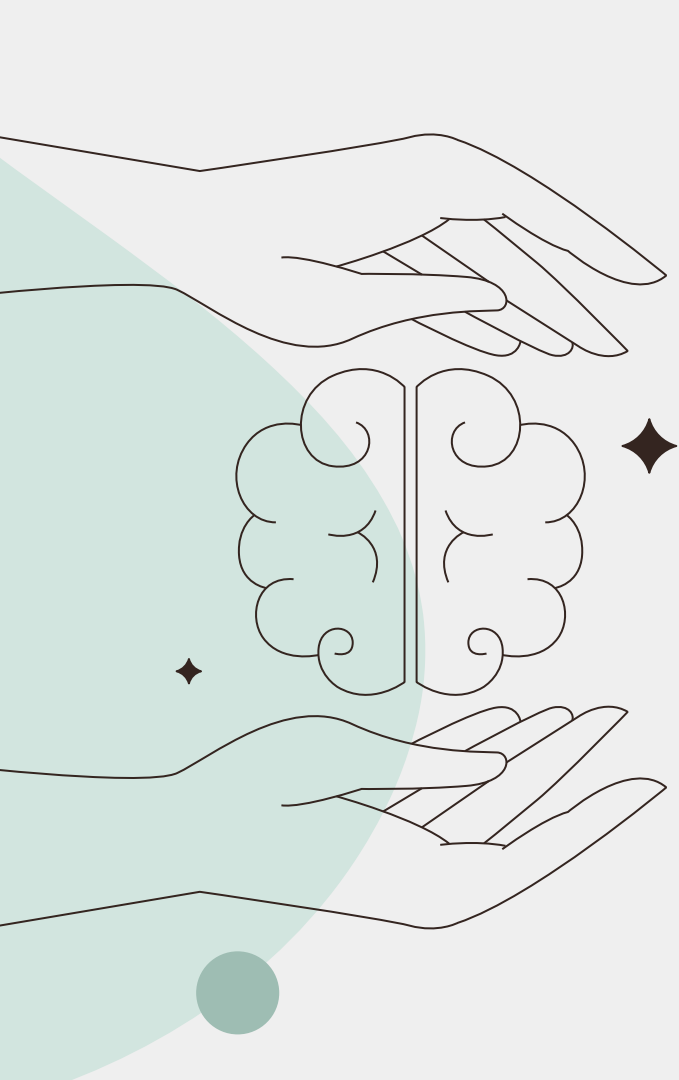
- **Early Identification** - Regular anonymous questionnaires can be prepared to assess students well-being.
- **Professorial Training** - Encouraging open discussion, creating a safe space for questions.
- **Destigmatizing Mental Health** - Students recommended open conversation about mental health issue and available resources.
- **Trust Building** - System should ensure confidentiality and effectiveness of counseling services.

## As a Complex System

- **Interconnected Factor:** Anxiety is influenced by myriad of factors including academic pressure, social relationships, financial stress, and personal experiences, forming a complex web.
- **Holism vs reductionism:** Academic performance is not the only indicator of anxiety. Other factors such as social relationships, financial difficulties, and personal health issues can also contribute to anxiety. Therefore, a holistic approach to address this issue is needed.
- **Emergent properties:** Anxiety manifests as an emergent property of the system, arising from the interaction of different components present in students surrounding.
- **Development:** Developing new solutions for anxiety requires ongoing negotiations and power dynamics between students, institutions, and instructors.
- **Self-organisation:** Universities are not fixed organizations, but rather they have the ability to adapt their structures and systems to address student anxiety. Some universities may choose to maintain a stressful learning environment and resist change, while others may create support groups and stress management workshops to cultivate a more positive and less anxiety-provoking culture for their students.

# Why a Wicked Problem

- **Resistance to change:** Students individual psychology and existing structure and norms within institution may resist efforts to implement systemic changes.
- **No ways to test a solution:** As there is not one solution, the solution changes depending upon the cause of anxiety as well as it changes from person to person as everything doesn't work on everyone
- **Uncertainty and Ambiguity:** The complex nature of issue require only professional intervention, poses knowledge limitation for most of stakeholders such as Professors, family , friends, etc.
- **No one-shot operation:** Just having counselors on campus is not sufficient
- **Symptom of another problem:** Education system and Economic Instability are wicked problem in themselves
- **No stopping rule:** When addressing student fear, there is no definitive conclusion. Anxiety is likely to persist to some extent even in the case of effective therapies.



**Thank you**

