



## Original Article



## Association of Classroom Anxiety with Age, Gender, and Academic Year among Nursing Students in Swat

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## ABSTRACT

Among nursing students, classroom anxiety is a common psychological issue that can negatively impact both academic achievement and the learning process as a whole. Developing successful educational support programs requires an understanding of the relationship between anxiety and demographic characteristics. **Objectives:** To evaluate nursing students' levels of classroom anxiety and investigate its relationship to a few demographic factors, such as age, academic year, and gender. **Methods:** This cross-sectional analytical study was conducted among nursing students in Swat utilizing a standardized questionnaire. 146 participants gave complete replies and were included in the analysis. Four levels of anxiety were identified: typical, mild to moderate, severe, and extreme. SPSS version 27.0 was used to analyze the data. **Results:** Classroom anxiety levels and academic year were found to be statistically significantly correlated ( $p=0.013$ ). Age ( $p=0.351$ ) and gender ( $p=0.968$ ) did not, however, show any significant correlations. **Conclusions:** Mild to moderate anxiety was the most often stated degree among individuals. Classroom anxiety is frequent among nursing students and changes significantly between academic years, whereas age and gender do not appear to be relevant variables. These findings underline the need for academic-year-specific treatments to attenuate anxiety and encourage psychological well-being within the nursing curriculum.

## INTRODUCTION

University students represent a group of people who typically undergo a key transition period from childhood to adulthood, a time widely recognized as one of the most stressful in a person's life [1]. Students face several obstacles and obligations during their academic careers that help them succeed, especially in higher education institutions [1]. To support this vulnerable group, it is vital to evaluate nursing students' mental health and put mental health interventions into place. Mental health problems such as anxiety, stress, and depression can negatively affect nursing students' overall well-being, academic performance, and the quality of care they provide to

patients [2]. Formally, anxiety is defined as an undesirable emotional state that includes the autonomic nervous system being activated together with a person's subjective feelings of tension, apprehension, and uneasiness. Additionally, anxiety is an emotionally adaptive reaction to ambiguous or terrifying situations that helps people act and react appropriately [3-6]. Furthermore, several studies demonstrate that classroom and clinical stressors in nursing education have detrimental long-term impacts that extend beyond transient anxiety. Higher levels of anxiety and depression are linked to academic stress [7]. These result in unhealthy habits like procrastination that



make studying less productive [8]. Chronic stress also predicts academic burnout and disengagement, which are associated with lower academic performance and motivation [9]. Crucially, stress during clinical placements can impair practical competence and attendance, jeopardizing the standard of clinical training [10]. When taken as a whole, these effects reduce students' well-being and their potential to become competent, resilient nurses. When taken as a whole, these effects reduce students' well-being and their potential to become competent, resilient nurses. Additionally, anxiety has a detrimental effect on students' clinical practise, academic performance, and quality of life. It can even result in a nursing programme dropout [11]. Students who experience excessive levels of stress and an inability to cope with the situation well may frequently suffer a variety of physical and mental health concerns [12]. Specifically, compared to their colleagues in other health-related areas and the general community, nursing students display much higher levels of anxiety as well as more psychological and physical symptoms [13]. Recognizing the importance of comprehending and resolving this problem in the educational setting is crucial. In particular, nursing students have to balance rigorous academic and practical requirements [3]. Furthermore, several studies have looked at the relationship between the demographics of nursing students and stress or anxiety, providing information about possible connections with anxiety in the classroom. Age has been proven to affect stress levels; according to some research, older students or those further along in their education may feel more stressed due to higher clinical and academic duties [3]. Additionally, gender differences have been seen; female students generally report higher levels of stress and anxiety than male students, presumably due to different coping strategies and societal expectations [14]. Additionally, stress and anxiety have frequently been linked to academic year or level of study, with students in particular years—such as first-year or final-year cohorts experiencing greater levels due to the transition to challenging coursework or impending clinical obligations [15]. However, some research indicates that correlations with age or gender may vary depending on context, suggesting that local institutional, cultural, and educational factors play a significant role in shaping pupils' anxiety in the classroom [16].

There is little data on the frequency and contributing factors of anxiety among nursing students in our local setting, even though research on mental health among healthcare students is expanding. Different populations may experience anxiety levels differently due to cultural, academic, and institutional variables. Therefore, this study

aimed to determine the degree of anxiety and the factors that contribute to it among nursing students, which is crucial for creating effective mental health care plans.

## METHODS

This study examined the relationship between nursing students' classroom anxiety and demographic factors such as age, gender, and academic year using a cross-sectional analytical methodology. A convenient sampling method was used. The study was conducted at United College of Nursing and Health Sciences, situated in Chail Shahgai, Saidu Sharif, Swat. Moreover, the study was conducted over a period of four months from September 2025 to December 2025. Furthermore, the inclusion criteria were first, second, third, and fourth-year nursing students, as well as both genders. The exclusion criteria include LHVs, absentee students, incomplete questionnaires, and consent refusals. Lady Health Visitors (LHVs) were not included in the study because their responsibilities at work, training programs, and curricula are different from those of nursing students. This could produce heterogeneity in the study population and have an impact on the assessment of anxiety among nursing students in particular. The sample size was calculated through Open Epi with parameters of population size: 234, expected frequency: 50%, confidence level: 95%, and margin of error: 5%. The calculated sample size was 146 participants. Moreover, 146 of the 234 nursing students in the population completed the questionnaire, yielding a 62.4% response rate. First, authorization was obtained from the college; second, the study obtained informed consent from the students; third, the study explained the research idea, purpose, procedure, benefits, and possible risks of the study; and finally, we distributed a physical copy. It took 10-20 minutes. If they had any difficulty, we explained the objective to them. A standardized questionnaire was adopted from a previous study via email [3]. It consisted of two sections: Section I: Demographic Information (age, gender, and academic year). Section II: Classroom Anxiety Scale. A standardized Classroom Anxiety Scale was used to measure nursing students' classroom anxiety. This instrument was adopted from a study conducted at a private nursing school in Karachi and had been previously used in Pakistan [3]. The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Certain items in the questionnaire were reverse-coded, specifically the items highlighted in bold in the original instrument. After reverse scoring these items, the total classroom anxiety score was calculated by summing the responses for all 20 items. The total classroom anxiety score, which ranges from 20 to 100, was calculated by adding the scores for each item. Typical anxiety was represented by a score of 20-44, mild to moderate anxiety by a score of 45-59,

marked to severe anxiety by a score of 60-74, and intense anxiety by a score of 75 or higher. The questionnaire used in this study was adopted, and the reliability reported in the study was 0.90, indicating excellent internal consistency [3].

Data entry and analysis were done using SPSS version 27.0. Demographic data were analysed using percentages and frequencies. The relationship between classroom anxiety and demographic characteristics was evaluated using the chi-square test. P-values below 0.05 were regarded as statistically significant. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the administration of the college. Participants' confidentiality and privacy were closely protected, and participation in the study was completely voluntary. Participants were free to leave the study at any moment without incurring any fees. Lastly, each subject provided written informed consent.

## RESULTS

The result shows the demographic details of the study participants, such as age, gender, and study year. The majority of participants (52.7%, n=77) were between the ages of 22 and 25, followed by those between the ages of 18 and 21 (46.6%, n=68), and only 1 (0.7%) was between the ages of 26 and 140 (29.95.9%) of the participants were men, while 6 (4.1%) were women. In terms of study year, 44 (30.1%) of participants were in the first year, 37 (25.3%) in the second, 35 (24.0%) in the third, and 30 (20.5%) in the fourth (Table 1).

The relationship between students' anxiety levels and demographic characteristics is displayed in the table. Anxiety levels are statistically significantly correlated with academic year ( $p=0.013$ ), suggesting that anxiety varies during study years. However, there is no significant correlation between anxiety levels and gender ( $p=0.772$ ) or age ( $p=0.071$ ) (Table 3).

**Table 3:** Association of Anxiety Level with Demographic Variables

Academic Year	Total anxiety level				Total	p-value
	Typical	Mild to Moderate	Severe	Intense		
	Frequency (%)					
1 <sup>st</sup> Year	13 (49.1%)	19 (22.1%)	10 (38.5%)	2 (66.7%)	44 (30.1%)	0.013
2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	7 (22.6%)	28 (32.6%)	2 (7.7%)	0 (0.0%)	37 (25.3%)	
3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	2 (6.5%)	23 (26.7%)	9 (34.6%)	1 (33.3%)	35 (24.0%)	
4 <sup>th</sup> Year	9 (29.0%)	16 (18.6%)	5 (19.2%)	0 (0.0%)	30 (20.5%)	
Total	31 (100%)	86 (100%)	26 (100%)	3 (100%)	146 (100%)	–
Age						
18-21 Years	20 (64.5%)	34 (39.5%)	12 (46.2%)	2 (66.7%)	68 (46.6%)	0.071
22-25 Years	11 (35.5%)	51 (59.3%)	14 (53.8%)	1 (33.3%)	77 (52.7%)	
26-29	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.2%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.7%)	
Total	31 (100%)	86 (100%)	26 (100%)	3 (100%)	146 (100%)	–
Gender						
Male	30 (96.8%)	82 (95.3%)	25 (96.2%)	3 (100%)	140 (95.9%)	0.772
Female	1 (3.2%)	4 (4.7%)	1 (3.8%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (4.1%)	
Total	31 (100%)	86 (100%)	26 (100%)	3 (100%)	146 (100%)	–

**Table 1:** Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

Variables	Frequency (%)	
Age	18-21	68 (46.6%)
	22-25	77 (52.7%)
	26-29	1 (0.7%)
Gender	Male	140 (95.9%)
	Female	6 (4.1%)
Year of Education	1 <sup>st</sup> Year	44 (30.1%)
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	37 (25.3%)
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	35 (24.0%)
	4 <sup>th</sup> Year	30 (20.5%)

A total of 146 nursing students who took part in the study provided data. 86 students, or 58.9% of the sample, said they had mild to moderate classroom anxiety. 31 students (21.2%) who reported typical anxiety levels came next. Just three students (2.1%) reported having significant classroom anxiety, whereas twenty-six students (17.8%) reported having severe anxiety. These results suggest that among nursing students, medium to severe classroom anxiety is the most prevalent experience (Table 2).

**Table 2:** Anxiety Level in the Classroom

Classroom Anxiety Level	Frequency (%)
Typical	31 (21.2%)
Mild to Moderate	86 (58.9%)
Severe	26 (17.8%)
Intense	3 (2.1%)
Total	146 (100.0%)

## DISCUSSION

The current study examined the association between a few demographic characteristics and classroom anxiety among nursing students. The findings demonstrated a statistically significant correlation between academic year and classroom anxiety, but not between age or gender. This study and recent research on nursing students share and differ in a number of ways. In the current study of 146 participants, the majority were aged 22–25 ( $n=77$ ; 52.7%), followed by 68 students (46.6%) aged 18–21, with only one student (0.7%) aged 26–29. Similarly, a study conducted in Karachi, Pakistan, showed that the majority of participants fell within the 18–24 age range ( $n=110$ ; 91.7%), with only 10 (8.3%) in the 25–30 category [3]. Regarding gender distribution, this study found that only a small minority ( $n=6$ ; 4.1 percent) of participants were female, while the great majority ( $n=140$ ; 95.9%) were male. These findings are consistent with a study conducted in Karachi, Pakistan, which likewise reported a sample comprising 100 (83.3%) males and 20 (16.7%) females [3]. In the present study, 31 students (21.2%) showed usual anxiety levels, while the majority of students ( $n=86$ , 58.9%) reported having mild to moderate classroom anxiety. Additionally, just three students (2.1%) reported intense anxiety, compared to 26 students (17.8%) who reported severe anxiety. Studies carried out in different international contexts show similarities in the incidence of typical anxiety. Additionally, a study revealed a typical anxiety level of 531 (33.8%) [17]. The findings of another study, where 339 (21.6%) of individuals had high anxiety levels, show an even more significant difference. These differences demonstrate how the prevalence of severe anxiety can vary greatly based on the particular academic setting and student demographics [18]. All of these numbers indicate that a sizable proportion of students keep their anxiety levels within a typical range, even though they are higher than the 21.2 per cent found in the current study. It is noteworthy that certain subgroups were incredibly small, such as individuals with severe anxiety ( $n=3$ ). Because percentages and statistical correlations may be erratic and not entirely representative of the general population, results pertaining to these subgroups should be regarded with caution. The majority of students ( $n=86$ , 58.9%) in the current study reported having mild to moderate anxiety in the classroom. Similarly, a study in Nigeria revealed that 12 (12.2%) of students expressed high anxiety, while 40 (40.8%) reported mild anxiety [18]. A study in Jordan confirms this tendency by pointing out that the most common type of anxiety was mild ( $n=100$ , 35.5%), followed by moderate ( $n=60$ , 21.3%) [19]. Another research found that only 32 (26.7%) of students had mild to moderate anxiety [4]. Twenty-six (17.8%) of the individuals in the

current study reported having severe anxiety. Another study discovered that 39 (13.8%) individuals had severe anxiety, whereas 234 (14.9%) of participants had severe anxiety [20]. These numbers most nearly match the results of the current study, indicating a similar proportion of students experiencing high-intensity anxiety. On the other hand, several other researchers found much lower levels of extreme stress or anxiety. For example, according to the studies, a mere 5.0% of their subjects suffered from acute stress or anxiety [4, 13]. Only 28 (0.9%) of the participants in a cross-sectional study from China reported having severe anxiety, which was the most significant difference [21]. Only three participants (2.1%) in the current study reported having severe classroom anxiety. This study's findings are similar to those found in international literature [22], which stated that just 7 (1.1%) of the participants had severe anxiety. Extreme anxiety is still a rare occurrence in various student demographics, as seen by these low percentages. Other studies, however, indicate much greater rates of serious distress. Extreme anxiety was reported by 13 (10.8%) of students, which is more than five times the rate in the current study [4]. According to the results, there was no statistically significant relationship between age and anxiety level ( $p=0.071$ ). However, another study shows that anxiety was correlated with respondents' age [23]. Furthermore, the results of this study show that there was no statistically significant relationship between gender and anxiety level ( $p=0.772$ ). In contrast, other research indicates that male nurses were more likely than female nurses to have modest pressure as opposed to extreme anxiety [23].

In this regard, there are a number of limitations to this study. First, the use of convenience sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings to all nursing students. Second, determining the causal links between academic characteristics and anxiety levels is limited by the cross-sectional methodology. Furthermore, it's possible that the highly skewed gender distribution, the majority of participants were male, does not fairly reflect the community of nursing students as a whole. Additionally, the study's external validity may be limited because it was carried out at a single institution. To improve generalizability, future research should include multi-center studies with random sample techniques and balanced gender representation. To investigate the causal links between academic pressures and anxiety in nursing students, longitudinal studies are also advised.

## CONCLUSIONS

According to the study's findings, nursing students frequently experience classroom anxiety. The degree of anxiety in the classroom was shown to be significantly correlated with the academic year, suggesting that anxiety

fluctuates depending on the stage of nursing education. However, there was no discernible correlation between gender or age and classroom anxiety. These results imply that educational demands and academic advancement may have a greater impact on classroom anxiety than demographic traits. Students' academic performance and psychological health may be enhanced by addressing anxiety at various academic stages.

### Authors' Contribution

Conceptualization: MH<sup>1</sup>, AB

Methodology: MH<sup>1</sup>, AB, MH<sup>2</sup>, AH

Formal analysis: MH<sup>1</sup>, AB, SUH

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Review and Editing: MH<sup>1</sup>, AB, MH<sup>2</sup>, AH, SUH, HA, AU, JI

All authors approved the final manuscript and take responsibility for the integrity of the work.

### Conflicts of Interest

All the authors declare no conflict of interest.

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