

Gender Differences in the Level of Anxiety of Young Adults During COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

Anxiety is an emotional state that occurs as a threatening event. Anxiety, like worry, is a normal human emotion that tells us something is wrong or needs to change. In other words, Anxiety is defined as the mind and body's reaction to any stressful, dangerous situations. It's the state of discomfort or distress. It's a feeling of fear that what's will happen in near future. As we all can relate to the current situation of COVID-19 that produces apprehension about what will happen in future. It is unpleasant, but it may motivate one to keep our family safe and healthy. In the present study we try to achieve the following objective: to compare the anxiety status of young girls and boys during the COVID 19 pandemic. The present study consists of 60 participants out of which 30 boys and 30 girls staying in NCR, from the age range of 19 to 25 years selected with help of random sampling. Keeping in mind the objective of the present study, the following hypothesis was proposed for the investigation of empirical verification: there will be no difference between young boys and girls in respect to their level of anxiety. The data was analyzed by using t-test as statistical tool. Hence, null hypothesis is rejected at 0.05 level of significance. Thus, it was seen that girls are high on anxiety in comparison to boys.

Keywords: Anxiety, Gender differences, COVID-19, young adults

It was in early December 2019, a disease of unknown origin impacted the health conditions of people worldwide. Coronavirus (COVID-19) disease was identified first in Wuhan, China, and has rapidly spread all over the world. World Health organisation (WHO) on January 30, 2020, declared that COVID-19 is an emergency that has caused concern internationally. The health advisories were broadcasted globally to deal with this deadly virus. Several policies were formulated to stop the spread of this virus, but unfortunately the whole world is in the capture of COVID-19 till date. Various health recommendations were suggested and they were implemented so that people are can be safe. Different ways were suggested to deal with this virus, such as to maintain social distancing and continuously washing hands. Despite all the efforts many countries are still in a lockdown state, this is impacting the mental health of people. They have continuous Fear of illness, fear of death,

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interfering in daily activities, restrictions on travel restrictions, reduced social status, jobs, financial problems and many more consequences are having psychological effects on all of us.

These conditions threaten the mental health of people in the society and lead to significant anxiety and worry.

However, anxiety is the mind and body's reaction to stressful, dangerous, or unfamiliar situations, as COVID-19. It's the sense of uneasiness, distress, or dread one may feel before a significant event. A certain level of Anxiety helps us to stay alert and aware, but for those suffering from an anxiety disorder, it feels far from normal - it can be completely debilitating. Thus, fear is basically an alarm reaction that takes place in response to some expeditious danger.

There has never been a complete agreement upon how distinct the two emotions of fear and anxiety are from each other. Historically, the most appropriate way of distinguishing between the fear and anxiety is the response pattern towards recognizable source of danger that would be interpreted as real by many. The source of danger when perceived to be real, leads to an emotion called as fear (e.g., "I'm afraid of snakes"). But when we talk about anxiety it becomes very difficult to specify the real danger clearly (e.g., "I'm anxious about my parents' health").

On the other hand, worry is basically a cognitive, perceptive or "thinking" aspect that examines the concerns about probable future threat. People who worry a lot, always tend to think more about their future and also about painful incidents that could possibly happen. When one refers to worry, it is not certainly that it can harm but it also helps to prepare for future events. Worry eventually leads to anxiety for solving problems in near future.

In this current situation of pandemic, individual's tend to experience anxiety as they are dealing with a virus around them that is threatening and harmful. They are fearful that something bad can happen to them or their family members. People do understand that nothing is in their control, which further leads to more stress and anxiety. During this time, it was also seen that, people complained lot about stress, depression and anxiety, because people had to follow restrictions of lockdown. They were supposed to stay at home, sometimes away from their family members too. Even though it has been observed that COVID-19 has impacted same number of men and women, but still have we go through the results gender differences can be perceived in terms of fatality rates ((CDC) C for DC and P, 2020).

On the other hand, few studies have examined about how much of anxiety and worry has been caused by Coronavirus which further led to fear and anxiety. Psychological studies which were conducted during this pandemic have revealed that women tend to state more psychological problems than men, such as anxiety and posttraumatic stress disorder.

However, this has led to psychological consequences, such as depression, anxiety and stress among young adults, for outcomes of job loss, unemployment, meeting daily expenses, lack of social support. They also tend to blame themselves for not able to meet their needs and even expectations and needs of their family members also. Lot of challenges have also been posed for front line workers like doctors, health professionals. In view of this tough and challenging times, psychologist recommend social support, compassion of oneself and others.

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This paper is an attempt to understand the gender differences in the anxiety level among young adults, during the pandemic. Through this paper, we would try and understand the possible causes of differences in anxiety level and recommend psychological strategies in dealing with the situation.

Understanding of difference will help to interpret the reasons behind the possible causes of anxiety among men and women. This will further help them in dealing with the situation with positive outlook and patience. As Fear is a natural, powerful, and primitive human emotion. It involves a universal biochemical response as well as a high individual emotional response. Fear alerts us to the presence of danger or the threat of harm, whether that danger is physical or psychological. Sometimes, fear stems from real threats, but it can also originate from imagined dangers. Fear can also be a symptom of some mental health conditions including panic disorder, social anxiety disorder, phobias, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Different theorists have explained that fear is a basic emotion that mainly involves activation of the “fight-or-flight” response of the autonomic nervous system. This is an almost immediate reaction to any impending threat for instance a dangerous killer or someone pointing a loaded gun towards us or what will happen if I get COVID disease. The threat is like an alarm that it is a dangerous situation and allows one to escape or flight. No matter how much emphasis we divert towards social distancing and continuous self-care by hand washing, little attention is being diverted towards psychological wellbeing of young adults.

An estimated one in seven Indians suffered from mental disorders of varying severity in 2017 with depression and anxiety being the commonest, according to a study by India State-Level Disease Burden Initiative. In 2017, 45 million people in India were suffering from anxiety disorders of varying degrees. The study also found that anxiety disorders in addition to depression, are the commonest mental disorders and their prevalence is increasing across India and is relatively higher in the southern states and in women.

Therefore, it becomes far more important that we should also pay attention towards the psychological effects of the COVID-19, which includes fear and anxiety, and follow the health protocols that is social distancing and continuous hand washing. It is also useful to examine gender differences which can have a variety of effects. In this regard, the present study aims to investigate anxiety among young adults.

Objective

In the present study we try to achieve the following objective –

- To compare anxiety status of young girls and boys.

Hypothesis

Keeping in mind the objective of the present study the following hypothesis was proposed for the investigation of empirical verification. There will be no difference between young boys and girls in respect to their level of anxiety.

METHODOLOGY

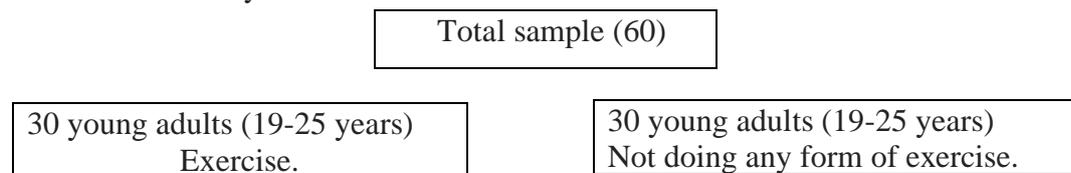
Participants

The sample of the present study consists of 60 participants out of which 30 boys and 30 girls staying in NCR, from the age range of 19 to 25 years selected with help of random sampling.

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Design

Total of 60 participants were taken from which 30 were boys and 30 were girls both ranging from the 18 to 25 years.



Sample

The total number of participants in the present study was 60, consisting of 30 boys and 30 girls between the age group of 18-25. Purposive sampling was resorted to for the purpose of collection of data.

Tool Used

Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) was used to measure the levels of anxiety during Covid-19 Pandemic. The Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) consists of 21 self-reported items (four-point scale) such as “wobbliness in legs” and “fear of losing control” and “scared” used to assess the intensity of physical and cognitive anxiety symptoms. Scores may range from 0 to 63: minimal anxiety levels (0–7), mild anxiety (8–15), moderate anxiety (16–25), and severe anxiety (26–63). Internal consistency for the BAI i.e., Cronbach’s alpha was found to be 0.92 and the test-retest reliability at the interval of one week was found to be 0.75 (Beck, Epstein, Brown & Steer, 1988). The BAI was moderately correlated with the revised Hamilton Anxiety rating scale (.51) and mildly correlated with the Hamilton Depression rating scale (.25) (Beck et al., 1988). Beck anxiety inventory (BD-II) .

Procedure

The aim of this practical is to understand the gender differences in levels of anxiety during Covid-19 Pandemic. We used Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) to measure the levels of anxiety focusing on the gender difference. Each student researcher collected data from two participants, one boy and one girl of the age bracket of 18 to 25. The sample consisted of a total 60 participants with 30 girls and boys each with the help of random sampling. The data was collected through a Google form which was prepared by the student researchers. This google form included the debriefing section, informed consent, and a section which dealt with the socio-demographic details. Then participants were provided with basic instructions on how to answer each question and were requested to give honest responses assuring that their identity would be kept confidential information provided by them would be used exclusively for the purpose of research work. After the collection of data, it was analysed by applying suitable statistical analysis as per to reach out the objective of the present study.

Statistical Analysis

The main aim of the present study was to compare the anxiety level of girls and boys. We analysed the data by using t-test to examine significant difference between boys and girls in respect to their level of anxiety. It is used to compare the means between two groups. If the t-value is below 1, the difference in means is considered not significant and the Null hypothesis is accepted. When the t-value exceeds to the critical value, t-critical, Null hypothesis is rejected and significant difference is found.

RESULTS

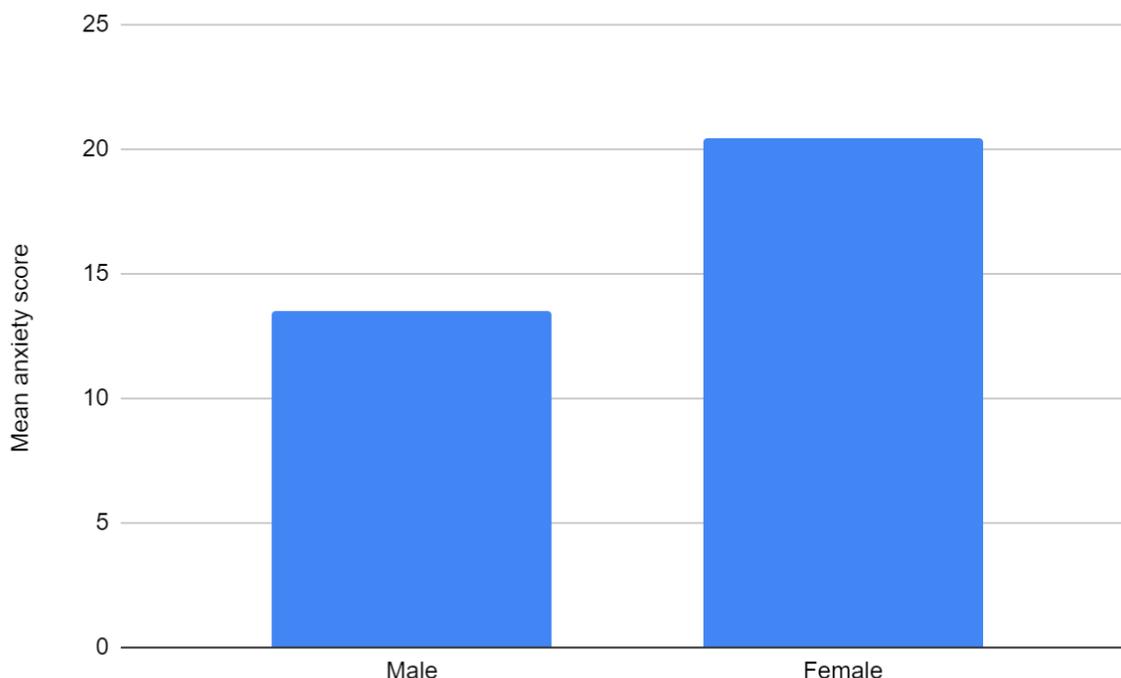
Table 1 - Showing the Raw Score and Mean Score of Two Groups on Anxiety

S. No.	Girls	Boys
Total Score	614	404
Mean Score	20.46	13.43

Table 2 - Showing the Mean, SD, and t-value of Two Groups

Groups	N	Mean	SD	Degrees of Freedom	t-value	p-value
Girls	30	20.46	12.79	58	2.25	0.027
Boys	30	13.43	11.15			

Figure 1 – Showing the Mean Anxiety Scores of Two Groups



In the t-distribution table, t-value for 58 df at 0.05 level of significance is 2.00. The obtained t-value is 2.25, and is much greater than this value. Hence, null hypothesis is rejected at 0.05 level of significance. Thus, we can say that in 95% cases, significant differences in the level of anxiety was found amongst girls and boys. There are only 5% chances out of 100 that two groups have the same level of anxiety.

DISCUSSION

Epidemics and pandemics are a periodic phenomenon. People in the community face several challenges during such periods. Impacts of these epidemics and pandemics are often intense, which may adversely affect the mental well-being of a given population. The fear and anxiety related to epidemics and pandemics also influence the behaviour of people in the community. Hence, this study attempted to evaluate the gender differences in the levels of anxiety experienced by young adults during Covid-19 pandemic.

Kessler et al., 1995, in the study showed that women are twice as men expected to develop stress- and anxiety-related psychiatric disorders. These differences can be attributed to gender

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sensitivity towards stressful and traumatic life events by women more in comparison to men. Studies by Goldstein et al., 2010 and Kogler et al., 2014, have examined sex differences in their response towards stressful situations and have recognised differences in their neural circuits which basically impact emotional reactivity.

In the existing study, a null hypothesis was formulated which said that there will be no significant difference in the experience of anxiety among young boys and girls during this pandemic. The results, however, indicated otherwise. The mean score of females for their level of anxiety came out to be 20.47 and that of males was 13.47. The t score obtained was 2.26 and the t-critical obtained was 1.67. As a result of this significant difference between the scores of males and females, the null hypothesis was rejected. It can be concluded that females experience more anxiety than males.

There are many research studies that support the result that females tend to face more anxiety than males. A study was done by Fatemeh Bahrami (2007) on high school students to compare the prevalence of anxiety in boys and girls. The results showed that there were significant differences between girls and boys with relevance to anxiety thoughts (health anxiety, social anxiety, and meta-worry). In comparison to boys, girls display more metacognitive beliefs about the uncontrollability of worry and believe that worry must be avoided. Another study done by Carmen P. McLean (2011) showed that one in three women met criteria for an anxiety disorder during her lifetime, compared to 22% of men.

Instead, COVID-19 has affected everyone both physically and psychologically. It had become a source of stress for both men and women, because of fear of being infected and isolation over a long period of time. Staying away from family and friends made a huge impact on the thought processes, making women more vulnerable to fear, anxiety, depression and stress (Mauvais-Jarvis et al., 2020). A study done by Liu et al., proved that symptoms of anxiety and acute stress are more prevalent in women, which was conducted during the initial phase of pandemic.

Other reasons which can be the cause of heightened anxiety levels observed in females are that females often show a higher risk towards developing anxiety-related disorders because of physiological as well as socio-cultural factors. College going girls demonstrate greater anxiety levels because they do not only have to keep their academics up to date but have a lot of other responsibilities such as helping out their mothers at home, taking care of their baby brothers and sisters, etc. The latest research done by Kreshnik Burani & Brady D. Nelson (2020) on college students supported this cause. Women, compared to men, demonstrated greater defensive motivation in anticipation of unpredictable threat, which in turn was related to greater panic symptoms. These results support a heightened sensitivity to unpredictable threat as one potential mechanism that contributes to greater anxiety symptoms in women.

Other valuable support to this study is that during the period of lockdown, lot of women were subjected to domestic violence, leading to depressive symptoms. Thus, shifting our concerns towards the well-being and health conditions of both men and women (Van der et al., 2020).

There can be other various physiological factors such as hormonal regulations in the body relating to the menstrual cycle which can elicit symptoms of anxiety. Studies have indicated that women in general are more prone to anxiety due to various reasons such as having to manage a full-time job in addition to household chores and childcare needs, adhering to the social norms that exist, and trying to keep pace with personal and family goals.

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A study done by Yunier B. Perez (2020) on gender and fear of Covid-19 in a Cuban population sample concluded that female participants experienced significantly greater fear and anxiety of COVID-19 than men. This study is consistent with other reports like a study conducted by Wang et al. (2020), females were found to be a predictor of the negative psychological impact of the COVID-19 epidemic. This study included 1210 respondents from 194 cities in China. According to authors, females suffered a greater psychological impact of the outbreak as well as higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression.

This study recommends that women you are leaving alone must be given counselling and guidance so that they are able to deal with the situation. Through this study we recommend that special initiatives should be taken by Ministry of family and women welfare to open few online counselling centres, where women who are living alone or victims of domestic violence can call and get immediate help. Thus, by paying special attention towards women will help in building their emotional and psychological well-being. It is also recommended that with the help of media, special programmes must be broadcasted to build resilience and endurance. News which inculcates fear and anxiety should be less visible and programmes with teach more about happiness and mindfulness should be encouraged.

During the research it was felt that because of the lack of time and proper resources, the sample size taken was small and restricted to the urban population. Adding to it, the responses made by the participants can be socially desirable due to the online constraint because of Covid-19 pandemic.

These limitations can be taken into account by future researchers. They can opt for a larger sample size and conduct the study offline for better understanding and findings. The observations in this sense would also aid the result findings as the responses would not be the only reliable results. Individual differences that account to the differences in the experiences of anxiety can also be scouted. Further studies thus can do a meta-analysis of both the individual differences and environmental factors in their combined totality.

CONCLUSION

It is evident from the present study that girls experienced more in it than boys, means scores on the Beck Anxiety Inventory showed 13.47 for boys and 20.47 for girls, which rejected the null hypothesis that there are significant gender differences in the experience of anxiety with respect to the present study. Previous studies that were conducted revealed that women have found to show higher levels of anxiety, depression, self-consciousness and variability than men. Therefore, this study showed that females were found to be more prone to anxiety during COVID-19.

Because of the lack of time and proper resources, the sample size taken was small and restricted to the urban population. Adding to it, the responses made by the participants can be socially desirable due to the online constraint because of Covid-19 pandemic.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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