

Research Paper

Depression, Anxiety, and Stress among Children of Alcoholics Preparing for Civil Service Exams

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ABSTRACT

This study intends to explore the intricacies of mental health among Indian competitive exam Aspirants. It aims to identify the prevalence of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress that CSE Aspirants deal with. The study also aims to highlight the distinctions between Children of Alcoholics and Children of Non-Alcoholics in terms of mental health-related struggles. According to the ANOVA results, CSE Aspirants and Children of Alcoholics are more likely to feel Depression, Anxiety, and Stress than individuals who aren't studying for any CSEs and Children of Non-Alcoholics respectively. Also significant interaction effect indicated that Children of Alcoholics aspiring for CSE experience more Depression, Anxiety, and Stress as compared to other groups under the present study.

Keywords: CSE Aspirants, Children of Alcoholics, Depression, Anxiety, Stress

Millions of young minds in India have their dreams shaped by the pursuit of a successful profession through competitive exams, which have become an essential component of the societal fabric. These exams open doors to esteemed organizations and sought-after employment prospects, promising a better future. However, the road to success is frequently paved with great obstacles and demands that can adversely affect aspirants' mental health. The goal of the current study is to shed light on an important but little-studied component of India's educational environment by delving into the complexities of stress and mental health among those preparing for competitive examinations, with special emphasis on children of alcoholics.

In India, competitive exams have evolved into high-stakes events as more candidates battle for a limited number of seats in elite universities or government positions. The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) for Group A and B posts in the Central Government, the State Public Service Commission (PSC) examinations for civil services in state governments, and various other state and central government exams have all witnessed significant increases in the number of applicants over time (*72nd Annual Report | UPSC, n.d.*) The pressure to do better than their peers increases with competition, creating a complicated web of psychological stressors.

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The Prevalence of Stress and Mental Health Challenges among Aspirants:

The aspirants' dedication to achieving success is admirable, but it can often come at a high cost to their mental health (Sihag, 2016). Stress and anxiety are exacerbated by societal standards, parental expectations, the need to perform at the top of the class, and the dread of failing (*Under Great Stress - The Hindu*, n.d.).

Many aspirants struggle with mental health problems including depression, anxiety, burnout, and even suicidal thoughts due to a lack of guidance and emotional support structures (Shandilya, 2023; Sharma, 2015). Long study hours, handling expenses, living alone, health concerns, and peer pressure have a devastating effect on the minds of civil service aspirants. They feel physically, emotionally, and psychologically drained. First-attempt aspirants experience high examination stress, which declines with the following attempts; however, aspirants in their second and third attempts experience moderate levels of stress (Sihag, 2016). They face a lot of difficulties in their personal and social lives. They feel isolated, and their relationships with their loved ones are distorted. After so much failure, most of them claimed that their circle of friends had shrunk. After so many failures, they displayed the dread of getting bad results, the avoidance of feedback, and the loss of respect in their lives (Tiwari & Punetha, 2018). Other factors that may have a significant impact on Aspirants' general Mental health includes gender, socioeconomic status, and familial environment. According to one study, female candidates have significantly higher levels of anxiety than male aspirants (Ola, 2016).

Children of Alcoholics: Due to several aspects of their upbringing and family dynamics, children of alcoholics may experience stress during competitive exam preparation differently from children of non-alcoholic parents.

Children of alcoholic parents tend to have more negative self-concepts (Kuriakose, 2018) and present lower academic performance in reading and arithmetic than children of nonalcoholic parents (Zanoti-Jeronymo & Carvalho, 2005). COA and non-COA groups also differ significantly in terms of anxiety, depression, self-esteem, separation anxiety, social phobia, obsessive-compulsive problems, and physical injury (Kuriakose, 2018; Omkarappa & Rentala, 2019). COA also exhibits more suicidal ideation and more susceptibility to alcoholism (Park & Schepp, 2015).

Coping Mechanisms: Grit and resilience are lower in children of alcoholics (Vance & ckv, 2021); such personality differences can lead to different levels of mental health issues in both groups. Children of Alcoholics also have limited resources to cope with mental health issues. They often adopt Emotion-Focused coping strategies such as Behavior Disengagement, Denial, Focus on and Venting of Emotions, Humor, and Substance Use (Klostermann et al., 2011). They also have COAs and a less healthy lifestyle (Serec et al., 2012); This unhealthy lifestyle and coping strategies further intensify their mental health issues.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

This research paper aims to delve into the nuances of stress and mental health among aspirants for competitive exams in India. It seeks to identify the prevalent stressors and mental health challenges faced by CSE aspirants. The study also endeavors to highlight the differences in mental health-related issues experienced by Children of Alcoholics (COA) and Non-Alcoholics (nCOA).

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In conclusion, this research paper endeavors to shed light on an often neglected aspect of the competitive examination landscape in India. By comprehensively studying the differences between COA and nCOA in stress and mental health among aspirants, we hope to advocate for a more compassionate and supportive approach towards the academic pursuits of these young minds, fostering not only their success but also their holistic well-being.

Operational Definitions:

1. **CSE Aspirants:** Participants in the present study who are preparing for various competitive examinations conducted by 'Maharashtra Public Service Commission' and 'Union Public Service Commission'.
2. **nAspirants:** Participants in the present study who reported that they're not preparing for the above-mentioned exams or any other exam currently.
3. **COAs:** Participants in the present study who have reported at least 3 positive responses on CAST-6 (Children of Alcoholics Screening Test).
4. **nCOAs:** Participants in the present study who have reported less than 3 positive responses on CAST-6 (Children of Alcoholics Screening Test).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Sample: Data collection was continued till the assigned sample for each group was obtained. A total of 336 responses were obtained during the data collection process till the last group achieved its required strength. Out of 336 responses, a sample of 220 that met the criteria of the study was extracted for the present study. All the participants were aged between 19 to 32 years and were from different districts of Maharashtra.

Variables:

1. Independent Variables:

- i. CAST-6
 - a) Children of Alcoholics (COA)
 - b) Children of Non-Alcoholics (nCOA)
- ii. Aspiration Status:
 - a) CSE Aspirants
 - b) Non-Aspirants (nAspirants)

2. Dependent Variables:

- i. DASS-21
 - a) Depression
 - b) Anxiety
 - c) Stress

Research Design:

We have used a 2x2 factorial Design for the present study.

Variables	COA	nCOA	Total
CSE Aspirants	55	55	110
nAspirants	55	55	110
Total	110	110	220

OBJECTIVES OF THE PRESENT STUDY:

1. To study the difference between CSE Aspirants and nAspirants in terms of measures of Depression, Anxiety, and stress.

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2. To study the difference between COAs and nCOAs in terms of measures of Depression, Anxiety, and stress.
3. To search the interaction effect between CAST-6 Status and Aspiration Status in terms of measures of Depression, Anxiety, and stress.

Hypotheses:

1. CSE Aspirants and nAspirants will significantly differ in Depression, Anxiety, and Stress.
2. COAs and nCOAs will significantly differ in Depression, Anxiety, and Stress as compared to nCOAs.
3. There will be significant interaction effect between CAST-6 Status and Aspiration Status.

Instruments/Tools:

1. **CAST-6:** Children of Alcoholics Screening Test (Short version) was used to categorize the population between Children of Alcoholics and Adult Children of Non-Alcoholics. CAST (modified): This scale is a subsample of questions appearing on the CAST, developed by Jones and Pilat, and has been used to screen for COAs. Three or more yes answers indicate COAs. The internal consistency of a shortened CAST containing the six selected items (CAST-6) is 0.86. (Hodgins et al., 1993).
2. **DASS-21:** Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale 21 (DASS-21) has been widely employed to assess the relationship and effect of depression, anxiety, and stress among various populations, age groups, clinical and non-clinical respondents and discriminate between anxiety and depression (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995; Raylu & Oei, 2004). There are two versions of the scale; a long-form (42 items) and short form (21 items) both versions are reliable and valid measures in clinical and nonclinical population(Henry & Crawford, 2005).

Procedure:

A briefing about the nature and purpose of the study was explained to the participants and their consent was taken. They were assured that all information taken from them would be kept confidential. The data was collected using a self-report questionnaire. The purposive Sampling Technique was used for the data collection. After the collection of responses, data analysis and interpretation was done by using SPSS software.

RESULTS:

Table 1: Showing the Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Mean	SD
Depression	220	10.82	3.462
Anxiety	220	10.64	3.689
Stress	220	11.53	3.759

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for depression, Anxiety, and Stress. The Mean of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress are 10.82, 10.64, and 11.53 respectively. The Standard Deviation scores of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress are 3.462, 3.689, and 3.759 respectively. It indicates that the spread of scores away from the mean is more for all three variables is almost similar. It is indicative that the data is clustered around the mean and is more reliable.

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It should be kept in mind that the distribution must be normal, because if the variable distribution deviates dramatically, then this may affect the validity of the results. This normal distribution is a base of parametric statistics, here we want to use an analysis of variance and hence according to the above table, we can use it safely.

1. CSE Aspirants and nAspirants will significantly differ in Depression, Anxiety, and Stress.

Table 2: Table shows Between-Subjects effects of independent variable Aspiration Status (CSE Aspirants vs. nAspirants) on Depression, Anxiety, and Stress.

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig. Level
Depression	Between Groups	445.314	1	445.314	44.556	0.01
	Within Groups	2178.773	218	9.994		
Anxiety	Between Groups	663.291	1	663.291	62.391	0.01
	Within Groups	2317.618	218	10.631		
Stress	Between Groups	465.455	1	465.455	38.590	0.01
	Within Groups	2629.382	218	12.061		

df (1,218) Significant level 0.05= 3.88, 0.01 = 6.75

We analyzed data using ANOVA to find the difference between Aspirants and Non-Aspirants of Civil Service Exams in terms of Depression, Anxiety and Stress. Table No. 2 indicates the result of ANOVA for the independent variable Aspiration Status. Here, F value for Depression, Anxiety, and Stress is 44.556, 62.391, and 38.590 respectively. Table value for (1,218) is 6.75 at 0.01; this table value is smaller than the calculated F value for Depression, Anxiety, and Stress. Hence, Hypothesis No. 1 is accepted. Statistically, it is observed that both groups significantly differ in term of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress.

2. COAs and nCOAs will significantly differ in Depression, Anxiety, and Stress as compared to nCOAs.

Table 3: Table shows Between-Subjects effects of independent variable CAST-6 Status (COA vs. nCOA) status on Depression, Anxiety, and Stress.

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig. Level
Depression	Between Groups	374.405	1	374.405	36.281	0.01
	Within Groups	2249.682	218	10.320		
Anxiety	Between Groups	420.073	1	420.073	35.760	0.01
	Within Groups	2560.836	218	11.747		
Stress	Between Groups	436.818	1	436.818	35.826	0.01
	Within Groups	2658.018	218	12.193		

df (1,218) Significant level 0.05= 3.88, 0.01 = 6.75

ANOVA was used to find the difference between Children of Alcoholics and Children of Non Alcoholics in terms of Depression, Anxiety and Stress. Table No. 3 indicates the result of ANOVA for the independent variable CAST-6 Status. Here, F value for Depression, Anxiety, and Stress is 36.281, 35.760, and 35.826 respectively. Table value for (1,218) is 6.75 at 0.01; this table value is smaller than the calculated F value for Depression, Anxiety, and Stress.

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Hence, Hypothesis No. 2 is also accepted. Statistically, it is observed that both groups significantly differ in term of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress.

3. There will be significant interaction effect between CAST-6 Status and Aspiration Status.

Table No. 4: Interaction Effects

Dependent Variable	Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig. Level
Depression	CAST-6 Status * Aspiration Status	57.521	1	57.521	6.998	0.01
	Error	1775.498	216	8.220		
Anxiety	CAST-6 Status * Aspiration Status	58.024	1	58.024	6.679	0.05
	Error	1876.527	216	8.688		
Stress	CAST-6 Status * Aspiration Status	72.009	1	72.009	7.227	0.01
	Error	2152.197	216	9.964		

df (1,216) Significant level 0.05= 3.88, 0.01 = 6.75

Table no.4 indicates the interaction effect between two independent variables- CAST-6 Status and Aspiration Status on the outcomes of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress.

For the Interaction Effect between CAST-6 Status and Aspiration Status (CAST-6*Aspiration) calculated F value is 6.998 and 7.227 for Depression and Stress respectively. These values are higher than the table value (1,216) i.e. 6.75 at 0.01. For Anxiety calculated F value is 6.679 which is higher than the table value (1,216) i.e. 3.88 at 0.05 level. This indicates that there is a significant Interaction effect between CAST-6 Status and Aspiration Status which alters the outcome of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress among the population being studied in the present research. Hence, hypothesis 3 is also accepted.

DISCUSSION:

Several studies have raised the issue of Mental Health among Civil Service Aspirants. The competitive nature of civil service exams, especially in countries with a large number of aspirants and limited vacancies, can lead to high levels of stress. The pressure to perform well and achieve a competitive rank can result in anxiety, sleep disturbances, and heightened stress levels (Sihag, 2016). Findings of the present study also indicate that Civil Service Aspirants experience heightened levels of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress as compared to their peers. It is observed that, there is lack of enough research on this population. Very few papers addressing this issue have some methodological drawbacks. Present study also has many limitations. This situation highlights the importance of quality research on Civil Service Aspirants in India.

Children of Alcoholics have already been marked as an in risk population through various studies. The National Mental Health Survey of India 2015–2016 found the prevalence of alcohol use disorders to be 9% in adult men (*GHO / By Category / Mortality*, n.d.).

A number of studies have attempted to provide some estimates on the extent of 'hidden harm.' (Velleman & Templeton, 2007) suggested problem drinkers, will on average,

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negatively affect the lives of two other close family members; some of whom may be their children. Several studies also reported that parental alcohol and illegal drug use can have injurious and enduring impacts on their children's health and wellness (Kuppens et al., 2020; McGovern et al., 2020a). Research has confirmed that children who grow up in surroundings where their parents use substances are at advanced threat for externalizing symptoms, like ADHD (Finan et al., 2015) and also internalizing symptoms, like depression or anxiety (Pisinger et al., 2016). Likewise, extensive research studies undertaken so far on the COAs highlight that parental substance use is associated with their children's substance use in adolescence (Chassin et al., 1999; Hussong et al., 2012).

Research regarding educational outcomes among children of alcoholics remains less studied (McGovern et al., 2020b). Few studies that we have found on several database also report their own limitations (Kuppens et al., 2020; McGrath et al., 1999). Present study is just another attempt to take a look at intricacies of CSE Aspirants and Children of Alcoholics preparing for CSE.

CONCLUSION:

In the present study, we have observed that Children of Alcoholics are more Depressed, Anxious, and Stressed as compared to their peers. We have also found that CSE Aspirants are more Depressed, Anxious, and Stressed as compared to their peers.

While finding if CSE aspirants who reported to be Children of Alcoholics and Non-Alcoholics differ in terms of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress, we searched for interaction effect if any. We found that there is a significant interaction effect between both the independent variables. This suggests that Children of Alcoholics aspiring for CSE experience more Depression, Anxiety, and Stress as compared to other groups under the present study; however, further studies are needed to support these findings.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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