Research Paper

Association between Test Anxiety and Selected Demographic Variables among B.Sc. Nursing Students in Bengaluru

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ABSTRACT

Background: Test anxiety is a common psychological problem among nursing students and can adversely affect academic performance, emotional well-being, and learning outcomes. First-semester B.Sc. nursing students are particularly vulnerable due to the transition into a demanding professional curriculum and increased academic expectations. **Objective:** To assess the level of test anxiety and determine its association with selected demographic variables among first-semester B.Sc. nursing students in Bengaluru. **Methods:** A quantitative descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among 100 first-semester B.Sc. nursing students selected using convenience sampling from selected nursing colleges in Bengaluru. Data were collected using a demographic proforma and a Modified Sarason's Test Anxiety Scale. Descriptive statistics were used to assess levels of test anxiety, and chi-square tests were applied to determine associations between test anxiety and selected demographic variables. **Results:** The majority of students experienced moderate levels of test anxiety. Statistically significant associations were found between test anxiety and gender, previous academic performance and perceived difficulty of subjects ($p < 0.05$). Female students, those with poorer academic performance, and students who perceived nursing subjects as difficult reported higher levels of test anxiety. No significant association was observed between test anxiety and age or place of residence. **Conclusion:** Test anxiety is prevalent among first-semester B.Sc. nursing students and is influenced by specific demographic and academic factors. Early identification of high-risk students and the implementation of targeted academic and psychological interventions are essential to reduce anxiety, promote mental well-being and enhance academic success in nursing education.

Keywords: Test Anxiety, Demographic Variables, Nursing Students, Academic Stress, Nursing Education

Education is a pivotal determinant of personal and professional development, particularly in health-related disciplines where academic competence directly influences quality of care. Within educational settings, assessment through examinations is a central mechanism for evaluating learning outcomes. However, for many students, examinations are not merely evaluative tools but significant sources of psychological stress. One of the most commonly reported academic stress responses is test anxiety, a phenomenon that has attracted increasing attention in educational and

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psychological research due to its detrimental effects on students' performance, mental health, and overall academic progression.

Conceptual Understanding of Test Anxiety

Test anxiety is a form of performance anxiety characterized by excessive worry, emotional tension, apprehension, and heightened physiological arousal occurring before or during evaluative situations such as examinations (Spielberger & Vagg, 1995). It is a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive components (worry, intrusive thoughts, fear of failure), emotional components (nervousness, helplessness), and physiological reactions (sweating, increased heart rate, gastrointestinal discomfort). These responses interfere with cognitive processing, impair concentration and memory retrieval, and reduce problem-solving efficiency, thereby preventing students from demonstrating their true academic capabilities (Sarason, 1984). Spielberger conceptualized test anxiety as a situation-specific trait that emerges in response to perceived evaluative threat. Students with high test anxiety tend to focus excessively on potential failure and its consequences rather than on the task itself, resulting in cognitive interference and diminished performance (Spielberger & Vagg, 1995). Over time, repeated exposure to anxiety-provoking examinations may reinforce negative academic self-concepts and lead to avoidance behaviors, reduced motivation and academic underachievement.

Academic Environment and the Growing Burden of Test Anxiety

In contemporary educational systems, academic success is increasingly linked to competitive evaluations, grading systems, and performance-based outcomes. Such environments place considerable pressure on students to excel, often equating academic achievement with personal worth and future success. This pressure is particularly pronounced in professional courses, where academic performance is directly tied to career prospects, licensure, and professional credibility (Putwain, 2007). Research across different educational contexts has consistently demonstrated that test anxiety is highly prevalent among students enrolled in medicine, nursing, engineering, and allied health sciences. These disciplines are characterized by dense curricula, frequent assessments, high expectations, and limited opportunities for academic failure, all of which contribute to heightened stress levels (Rafati et al., 2017). When left unaddressed, persistent test anxiety may result in emotional exhaustion, decreased academic engagement and increased risk of mental health problems such as depression and burnout.

Nursing Education and Test Anxiety

Nursing education is uniquely demanding, as it requires students to integrate theoretical knowledge with practical clinical skills while maintaining high standards of professionalism, ethical conduct, and patient safety. Undergraduate nursing students must master complex subjects such as anatomy, physiology, pharmacology, and medical-surgical nursing, in addition to developing clinical competence in real-world healthcare settings. The dual burden of academic and clinical responsibilities places nursing students at heightened risk for stress and anxiety (Rafati et al., 2017). First-semester B.Sc. nursing students are particularly vulnerable to test anxiety due to the significant transition from pre-university education to a professional healthcare curriculum. This transition involves adapting to new teaching methodologies, increased academic workload, frequent internal assessments and strict evaluation criteria. Many students experience difficulty adjusting to self-directed learning, clinical exposure, and time management demands during the initial phase of nursing

education. These challenges may trigger feelings of inadequacy, fear of failure and academic self-doubt, all of which contribute to test anxiety.

In addition, nursing students often face high expectations from families and society, especially in cultures where education is viewed as a pathway to social mobility and financial security. Fear of disappointing family members or failing to meet societal standards can further intensify anxiety levels. Studies conducted among nursing students have reported moderate to high levels of test anxiety, particularly during the early semesters of training (Rafati et al., 2017; Rana & Mahmood, 2010).

Psychological and Academic Consequences of Test Anxiety
Test anxiety has been shown to have far-reaching consequences beyond examination performance. Cognitively, anxiety disrupts attention, working memory and information processing, leading to errors and incomplete responses during tests (Sarason, 1984). Emotionally, students with high test anxiety often experience chronic worry, irritability and low self-esteem. Physiologically, repeated activation of stress responses may contribute to fatigue, sleep disturbances, headaches, and other somatic complaints. Academically, students with high test anxiety are more likely to underperform relative to their actual abilities, resulting in lower grades and diminished academic confidence. Over time, repeated academic setbacks may reinforce negative self-perceptions and create a cycle of anxiety and poor performance. In professional programs such as nursing, this cycle can undermine students confidence in clinical competence and negatively affect their readiness for professional practice (Spielberger & Vagg, 1995).

Role of Demographic Variables in Test Anxiety
Individual and demographic characteristics play a significant role in shaping students' experiences of test anxiety. Variables such as gender, age, academic background, prior examination performance, and perceived academic difficulty have been widely studied in relation to anxiety levels. Understanding these associations is essential for identifying vulnerable subgroups and tailoring interventions accordingly. Gender differences in test anxiety have been consistently reported in the literature, with female students generally exhibiting higher anxiety levels than their male counterparts (Putwain, 2007). Several explanations have been proposed for this disparity, including greater emotional expressiveness, heightened self-expectations and socialization patterns that encourage women to internalize stress. In many cultural contexts, female students may also experience additional pressures related to balancing academic responsibilities with familial expectations. Previous academic performance is another critical factor influencing test anxiety. Students who have experienced academic difficulties or failures in the past may develop anticipatory anxiety regarding future examinations. Fear of repeating past failures and concerns about academic competence often intensify worry and self-doubt during evaluative situations. Conversely, students with strong academic histories may exhibit greater confidence and lower anxiety, although high achievers may still experience anxiety due to perfectionistic tendencies (Rana & Mahmood, 2010).

Perceived difficulty of academic subjects is also closely linked to test anxiety. Nursing subjects that are perceived as complex or conceptually demanding may evoke greater anxiety, particularly when students feel inadequately prepared or lack effective study strategies. Subject-related anxiety may be exacerbated by dense syllabi, limited revision time and high-stakes examinations.

Test Anxiety in the Indian Nursing Education Context

In India, nursing education has undergone significant expansion in recent decades to meet the growing demand for healthcare professionals. While this expansion has increased access to nursing education, it has also intensified academic competition and institutional expectations. Indian nursing students often come from diverse educational backgrounds, including rural and urban settings, English- and vernacular-medium schooling and varying socio-economic conditions. These differences may influence students academic preparedness, confidence, and stress perception. Moreover, the Indian education system traditionally places strong emphasis on examination performance, often equating success with high grades. This exam-centric culture may amplify test anxiety, particularly among students enrolled in professional courses. Limited availability of mental health support services within educational institutions further compounds the problem, leaving many students to cope with anxiety on their own.

Despite the growing recognition of test anxiety as a significant academic concern, research focusing specifically on nursing students in the Indian context remains limited. Most available studies have examined stress and anxiety in general, with fewer investigations exploring the association between test anxiety and demographic variables among nursing students, particularly during the early semesters of training.

Need for the Present Study

Understanding the association between test anxiety and selected demographic variables among B.Sc. nursing students is essential for several reasons. First, identifying demographic factors associated with higher anxiety levels can help educators and administrators recognize students who are at greater risk for academic and psychological difficulties. Second, such insights can inform the development of targeted interventions, including counseling services, stress-management programs and academic mentoring tailored to the needs of specific student groups. Focusing on first-semester nursing students is particularly important, as early academic experiences often shape students' long-term adjustment, motivation and retention within the program. Interventions implemented during this critical period may prevent the escalation of anxiety and promote healthier coping strategies throughout the course of nursing education. Therefore, the present study aims to examine the association between test anxiety and selected demographic variables among B.Sc. nursing students in Bengaluru. By exploring these relationships, the study seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge and provide evidence-based recommendations for improving student support services within nursing education institutions.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study adopted a quantitative descriptive cross-sectional research design to assess the association between test anxiety and selected demographic variables among B.Sc. nursing students. A descriptive design is appropriate when the objective is to systematically describe characteristics of a population or phenomenon as it exists, without manipulating variables (Polit & Beck, 2017). The cross-sectional approach allows for the collection of data at a single point in time, enabling the identification of prevailing levels of test anxiety and their relationship with demographic characteristics. Quantitative methods were selected to ensure objectivity, precision and replicability of findings. By employing standardized measurement tools and statistical analysis, the study aimed to generate measurable and comparable data on test anxiety levels among nursing students. Cross-sectional designs are widely used in educational and psychological research to examine associations between psychological

variables and demographic factors, particularly in student populations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This design was considered suitable for the present study as it facilitated the examination of naturally occurring variations in test anxiety across different demographic groups without the influence of intervention or experimental manipulation.

Study Setting
The study was conducted in selected nursing colleges in Bengaluru, Karnataka. Bengaluru is a major educational hub in South India, hosting a large number of nursing institutions affiliated with universities and regulatory bodies such as the Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences (RGUHS). These institutions enroll students from diverse socio-economic, cultural, and educational backgrounds, making them appropriate settings for examining demographic variations in test anxiety. The selected nursing colleges follow a standardized undergraduate nursing curriculum and evaluation system, which includes regular internal assessments and university examinations. The academic environment in these institutions is characterized by intensive coursework, frequent examinations, and high academic expectations, particularly for first-semester students who are adapting to professional nursing education. Conducting the study in this setting enhanced the relevance and generalizability of findings within similar nursing education contexts.

Population and Sample
The target population for the study comprised first-semester B.Sc. nursing students enrolled in selected nursing colleges in Bengaluru. First-semester students were deliberately chosen as they represent a group undergoing significant academic transition from pre-university education to professional nursing training. Previous research has indicated that students in the early phase of nursing education are more vulnerable to academic stress and test anxiety due to unfamiliar curricula, increased workload, and adjustment challenges (Rafati et al., 2017).

Sample Size
A sample size of 100 students was selected for the study. This sample size was considered adequate for descriptive analysis and for identifying statistically significant associations using chi-square tests, as recommended for cross-sectional studies exploring relationships between categorical variables (Polit & Beck, 2017).

Sampling Technique
A convenience sampling technique was employed to select participants. Convenience sampling involves selecting participants who are readily available and willing to participate in the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Although this method may limit generalizability, it is commonly used in educational research due to feasibility, time constraints, and ease of access to participants within institutional settings. In the present study, convenience sampling was deemed appropriate as the primary objective was to explore associations rather than to generalize findings to all nursing students. Efforts were made to include students from different demographic backgrounds within the available population to enhance representativeness.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria
Inclusion criteria:
- First-semester B.Sc. nursing students
- Students enrolled in selected nursing colleges in Bengaluru
- Students who were present during data collection

- Students willing to participate and provide informed consent

Exclusion criteria:
- Students from higher semesters
- Students who were absent during data collection
- Students who declined participation

Tools for Data Collection
Data were collected using two structured tools:
Section A: Demographic Proforma
A self-structured demographic proforma was developed by the investigator to collect information on selected demographic variables. These variables were identified based on a review of literature indicating their relevance to test anxiety. The demographic proforma included the following items:
- Age
- Gender
- Place of residence (urban/rural)
- Previous academic performance
- Perceived difficulty of subjects

Demographic variables are essential in understanding individual differences in psychological responses to academic stressors. Studies have demonstrated that gender, academic history, and perceived academic difficulty significantly influence test anxiety levels among students (Putwain, 2007; Rana & Mahmood, 2010).

Section B: Modified Sarason's Test Anxiety Scale
Test anxiety was assessed using a Modified Sarason's Test Anxiety Scale, a standardized and widely used instrument for measuring anxiety related to examinations. Sarason's Test Anxiety Scale focuses on cognitive and emotional components of anxiety, including worry, fear of failure, and test-related tension (Sarason, 1984). The modified version used in the study consisted of structured items with predefined response options, allowing for quantitative scoring of anxiety levels. The scale has been extensively used in student populations and has demonstrated good psychometric properties, including reliability and validity (Spielberger & Vagg, 1995). Higher scores on the scale indicate higher levels of test anxiety.

Validity and Reliability of the Tool
The validity of Sarason's Test Anxiety Scale has been established through extensive use in educational and psychological research. Content validity is supported by the scale's comprehensive coverage of cognitive and emotional aspects of test anxiety (Sarason, 1984). Construct validity has been demonstrated through correlations with academic performance and other measures of anxiety (Spielberger & Vagg, 1995). Reliability of the scale has been reported with satisfactory internal consistency coefficients in previous studies, indicating its suitability for assessing test anxiety among student populations. The modified version used in the present study retained the core structure of the original scale, ensuring consistency and accuracy in measurement.

Data Collection Procedure
Prior permission was obtained from the authorities of the selected nursing colleges before data collection. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants, and informed consent was obtained. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and they were informed that participation was voluntary. The questionnaires were administered in a classroom setting at a time convenient to the students, ensuring minimal disruption to academic activities. Clear instructions were provided, and students were encouraged to respond honestly. The average time taken to complete the questionnaire was approximately 20–30 minutes.

Ethical Considerations
Ethical principles were strictly adhered to throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality of their responses. No identifying information was collected and data were used solely for research purposes. The study involved minimal risk to participants, as it focused on self-reported perceptions of test anxiety without any intervention. Ethical conduct was maintained in accordance with standard guidelines for research involving human participants (Polit & Beck, 2017).

Data Analysis
Data were coded and entered into a statistical software package for analysis. Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were used to summarize demographic characteristics and levels of test anxiety. Inferential statistics were employed to examine the association between test anxiety and selected demographic variables. The chi-square test was used to determine statistically significant associations between categorical variables. The chi-square test is appropriate for cross-sectional studies examining relationships between non-parametric variables (Field, 2018). A level of significance of $p < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant. Findings were presented in the form of tables and narratives to facilitate interpretation.

RESULTS
The present study aimed to assess the level of test anxiety among first-semester B.Sc. nursing students and to determine its association with selected demographic variables. Data obtained from 100 nursing students were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings are presented under the following headings.

Distribution of Demographic Variables
Before examining test anxiety levels, it is important to understand the demographic profile of the participants. Table 1 presents the distribution of students according to selected demographic variables.

Table 1: Distribution of Nursing Students According to Demographic Variables (N = 100)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	≤18 years	28	28%
	>18 years	72	72%
Gender	Male	32	32%
	Female	68	68%

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Residence	Urban	55	55%
	Rural	45	45%
Previous Academic Performance	Good	46	46%
	Average	38	38%
	Poor	16	16%
Perceived Difficulty of Subjects	Easy	22	22%
	Moderate	41	41%
	Difficult	37	37%

The majority of students were above 18 years of age (72%) and female (68%). More than half of the students belonged to urban areas (55%). Nearly half of the students reported good previous academic performance, while over one-third perceived nursing subjects as difficult, **indicating a potential risk factor for increased test anxiety.**

Levels of Test Anxiety Among Nursing Students
The overall level of test anxiety among nursing students was assessed using the Modified Sarason's Test Anxiety Scale. The distribution of students according to test anxiety levels is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of Students According to Levels of Test Anxiety (N = 100)

Level of Test Anxiety	Frequency	Percentage
Mild	24	24%
Moderate	52	52%
Severe	24	24%

More than half of the nursing students (52%) experienced moderate test anxiety, while nearly one-fourth (24%) reported severe anxiety. This finding indicates that a substantial proportion of students experience significant psychological stress related to examinations.

Association Between Test Anxiety and Gender
To examine whether test anxiety differed by gender, a chi-square test was applied. The association between test anxiety and gender is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Association Between Test Anxiety and Gender (N = 100)

Gender	Mild	Moderate	Severe	Total
Male	12	15	5	32
Female	12	37	19	68
Chi-square value				8.21
p-value				0.016*

*p < 0.05 (Significant)

Female students exhibited higher levels of moderate and severe test anxiety compared to male students. The chi-square test revealed a statistically significant association between gender and test anxiety, indicating that gender plays an important role in influencing anxiety levels among nursing students.

Association Between Test Anxiety and Previous Academic Performance

The relationship between test anxiety and students' previous academic performance was analyzed using the chi-square test. The findings are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Association Between Test Anxiety and Previous Academic Performance (N = 100)

Previous Academic Performance	Mild	Moderate	Severe	Total
Good	18	22	6	46
Average	6	22	10	38
Poor	0	8	8	16
Chi-square value				14.67
p-value				0.002*

*p < 0.05 (Significant)

Students with average and poor academic performance showed higher levels of moderate and severe test anxiety compared to those with good academic performance. The association between previous academic performance and test anxiety was statistically significant, suggesting that academic history strongly influences anxiety levels during examinations.

Association Between Test Anxiety and Perceived Difficulty of Subjects

Students' perception of subject difficulty was analyzed in relation to test anxiety levels. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Association Between Test Anxiety and Perceived Difficulty of Subjects (N = 100)

Perceived Difficulty	Mild	Moderate	Severe	Total
Easy	14	6	2	22
Moderate	8	25	8	41
Difficult	2	21	14	37
Chi-square value				18.34
p-value				0.001*

*p < 0.05 (Significant)

Students who perceived nursing subjects as difficult reported significantly higher levels of moderate and severe test anxiety. The chi-square analysis showed a statistically significant association, indicating that perceived academic difficulty is a major contributing factor to test anxiety.

DISCUSSION

The present study explored the association between test anxiety and selected demographic variables among first-semester B.Sc. nursing students in Bengaluru. The findings indicate that test anxiety is a prevalent psychological concern among nursing students, with the majority experiencing moderate levels of anxiety. This suggests that although students may continue to engage in academic activities, elevated anxiety may interfere with optimal performance, concentration, memory, and emotional well-being. Similar observations have been reported in earlier studies conducted among nursing and medical students, where moderate levels of test anxiety were found to be common during the initial phases of professional education (Rana & Mahmood, 2010; Rafati et al., 2017).

Gender and Test Anxiety

The present study found a statistically significant association between test anxiety and gender, with female students reporting higher levels of anxiety compared to male students. This finding is consistent with numerous studies across different educational contexts, which have consistently demonstrated that female students tend to experience higher academic and test-related anxiety (Putwain, 2007; Spielberger & Vagg, 1995). Higher anxiety among female students has been attributed to greater emotional sensitivity, heightened self-expectations, fear of failure, and increased concern about academic evaluation. In the context of nursing education, which is predominantly female and academically demanding, these factors may further intensify anxiety levels. Rafati et al. (2017) reported similar findings among nursing students, suggesting that female students often internalize academic stress more intensely and are more likely to experience worry and self-doubt during examinations. These findings underscore the importance of gender-sensitive counseling and stress-management interventions within nursing education programs.

Previous Academic Performance and Test Anxiety

The study also revealed a significant association between test anxiety and previous academic performance. Students with average or poor academic performance in prior examinations exhibited higher levels of test anxiety compared to those with good academic records. This relationship has been widely supported in the literature, where poor academic performance has been identified as both a cause and consequence of test anxiety (Cassady & Johnson, 2002; Rana & Mahmood, 2010). Students with a history of academic difficulties may develop negative self-perceptions, low academic self-efficacy, and fear of repeated failure, all of which contribute to heightened anxiety during evaluations. Cassady and Johnson (2002) emphasized that cognitive worry, a core component of test anxiety, is particularly pronounced among students who doubt their academic abilities. The findings of the present study reinforce the need for early identification of students with poor academic performance and the provision of remedial teaching, mentoring, and confidence-building strategies.

Perceived Difficulty of Subjects and Test Anxiety

Perceived difficulty of nursing subjects emerged as another significant factor associated with test anxiety in the present study. Students who perceived nursing subjects as difficult reported higher levels of moderate and severe anxiety. This finding aligns with previous studies that have demonstrated a strong link between academic workload, perceived complexity of content, and examination-related stress among nursing students (Jimenez et al., 2010; Rafati et al., 2017). Nursing curricula often involve complex theoretical concepts, extensive memorization, and practical skill assessments, which may overwhelm students, particularly during the first semester. When students perceive academic demands as exceeding their coping resources, anxiety levels tend to increase. These findings highlight the critical role of effective teaching methods, academic guidance, and structured learning support in reducing students' perception of difficulty and associated anxiety.

Non-significant Associations

In contrast, the present study did not find a statistically significant association between test anxiety and variables such as age and place of residence. This suggests that test anxiety among first-semester nursing students may be more strongly influenced by academic and psychological factors than by basic demographic characteristics. Similar findings have been reported in previous studies, where age and residential background showed limited influence

on test anxiety levels when compared to academic stressors and personal coping abilities (Putwain, 2007; Rana & Mahmood, 2010).

Implications of Findings

Overall, the findings of the study emphasize that test anxiety among nursing students is a multifactorial phenomenon influenced by gender, academic history, and perceived academic demands. Test anxiety should not be viewed solely as an individual psychological weakness but as an outcome shaped by educational environments and demographic contexts. Addressing test anxiety through early screening, academic counseling, stress-management programs, bibliotherapy, and supportive teaching practices can significantly enhance students' academic adjustment and mental well-being.

CONCLUSION

The present study concludes that test anxiety is a prevalent psychological concern among first-semester B.Sc. nursing students and is significantly associated with selected demographic variables. The majority of students experienced moderate levels of test anxiety, indicating that while they may continue to function academically, their learning efficiency, academic performance and psychological well-being may be adversely affected. These findings highlight the need for greater attention to mental health concerns within nursing education, particularly during the initial phase of professional training. Significant associations were observed between test anxiety and gender, previous academic performance, and perceived difficulty of nursing subjects. Female students, those with lower prior academic achievement, and students who perceived subjects as difficult were found to be at higher risk of experiencing elevated levels of test anxiety. In contrast, variables such as age and place of residence did not show a significant association, suggesting that academic and psychological factors play a more prominent role in influencing anxiety than basic demographic characteristics. The study underscores that test anxiety is not merely an individual psychological issue but a multifactorial phenomenon influenced by educational demands and personal academic experiences. Early identification of students with high anxiety levels, along with the implementation of targeted interventions such as academic counseling, stress-management programs, mentoring, bibliotherapy, and supportive teaching strategies, is essential. Addressing test anxiety proactively can enhance students' academic adjustment, promote mental well-being, and ultimately contribute to improved academic success and professional competence among nursing students.

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Conflict of Interest
The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.