

## Anxiety, Alexithymia, and Interpersonal Communication Styles among Pakistani University Teachers

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** Major objective of the study was to investigate relationships between the symptoms of anxiety and alexithymia among university teachers. We also examined preferred communication styles of the teachers how face symptoms of anxiety and alexithymia. Comparison between the female and male teachers regarding the presence of anxiety and alexithymia as well as preferred communication styles was accepted as secondary objectives of this inquiry.

**Methodology:** 120 university teachers including Assistant Professors and Lecturers selected from two prominent public sector universities of Pakistan participated in the study. Three different tools were adapted to measure the participants' preferred communication styles and prevalence of the symptoms of depression and anxiety. Collected data were analyzed using inferential statistics to reach on conclusions.

**Results:** Significant and positive correlation between the symptoms of alexithymia and anxiety among university teachers was found ( $r=0.287$ ;  $p<0.005$ ). Results demonstrate that male university teachers experience comparatively higher level of alexithymia than their female colleagues ( $t=5.534$ ;  $p<0.001$ ). The results show that male university teachers comparatively scored higher on communication style of verbal aggression than their female colleagues ( $t=30.886$ ;  $p<0.001$ ). The female university teachers, on the other side, scored comparatively higher on expressive communication styles than their male colleagues ( $t=30.490$ ;  $p<0.001$ ).

**Conclusions:** The study concluded that teachers with comparatively higher symptoms of alexithymia were more likely to prefer verbal aggression in their communication. On the other side, university teachers with higher symptoms of anxiety were more likely to prefer expressive communication styles.

**Keywords:** University; Symptoms; Disorders; Depression; Education

### Introduction

Teachers are considered nation builders and responsible for student's character making. Their personality should be balanced so that students can get positive and effective aspirations. It is observed that generally teachers have a balanced personality but sometimes they may also face psychiatric problems like depression, anxiety and alexithymia. Researchers investigated the impact of gender and working environment on the level of anxiety [1]. Results of this research indicate that primary and middle school teachers were generally affected by state anxiety. It also showed that male teachers had higher level of anxiety as compare to their female colleagues. Ameen et al. conducted a research and checked the evidence for teacher's anxiety. Sample of their study was accounting educators from United States. Results indicated that majority of respondents reported that they experience some type of teaching anxiety. Some reported that they experience the physical symptoms of anxiety and other reported that they feel psychological reactions such as apprehension [2]. Researchers also checked the evidence for relationship between cognitive mechanism of alexithymia, empathy and empathic concern. Associations among proposed emotional gears of alexithymia and empathy were fundamentally due to collective covariance with the nervousness, anxiety. Results indicated that there is an explicit relationship between these constructs which are affected by both anxiety and depression [3].

Possible associations between anxiety and alexithymia in non-clinical sample of late adolescents were also identified by researchers [4]. 935 adolescents were selected and their mean age was 19 years. The results indicated that there was no significant difference in gender in the prevalence of alexithymia. It also indicated that alexithymic scored higher on anxiety scale and they were also highly anxious. Meganck et al. inspected the alexithymia and interpersonal problems. They

investigated this phenomenon by mean of lexical content analysis. The results of this study indicated that alexithymia was related to less complex vocabulary for communication words [5].

Researchers examined both verbal and non-verbal expressions as a component of alexithymia. People who had trouble discovering their feelings were emotionally less expressive and experienced optimistic feeling during the optimistic gossip and negative feeling during negative gossip. Additional aspects of alexithymia were not independently linked to self-expressions. Verbal lucidity also not separately associated to alexithymia [6]. These results were consistent with Vanheule et al. who studied the Alexithymia and interpersonal problems [7]. They investigated connections between Alexithymia and the interpersonal relationship troubles, for this purpose they selected the 404 outdoor patients and 157 students. The results of this study indicated that interpersonal problems are significantly and reliably related to Alexithymia.

In the current study, we identified the symptoms of anxiety and alexithymia among the university teachers. We also investigated

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their preferred communication styles. Major aim of this study was to investigate relationship between the prevalence of anxiety and alexithymia among university teachers as well as identifying their preferred communication styles. Prominent educationists, psychologists and researchers pay much attention on psychological health of the teachers. The study provides comparative levels of anxiety and communication styles among male and female teachers as well. Detail research objectives of the study were to:

1. Determine the presence of anxiety and alexithymia symptoms among university teachers included in the sample.
2. Find out relationship between the symptoms of anxiety and alexithymia among the university teachers.
3. Investigate preferred communication styles of the university teachers who are facing anxiety and alexithymia symptoms.

### Research Methodology

The study was descriptive in nature and based on correlation and comparative group research design to explore the relationship between anxiety and alexithymia as well as examine the communication styles of university male and female teachers. We used survey method to collect the required data. Focus of the entire research process was on achieving research objectives. Detail research procedure is described here in following lines.

### Participants

Sample of this study was consisted of male and female university lecturers and assistant professors (N=120). 30 female and 30 male teachers, 40 lecturers and 10 assistant professors (n=60), was taken from the Govt. Collage University Faisalabad and 30 female and 30 male teachers, 40 lecturers and 20 assistant professors, (n=60) was taken from the University of Agriculture Faisalabad. The age of the participants ranged from 25 to 60 years.

### Research instruments

Depression anxiety and stress scale developed by Lovibond and Lovibond was adapted to check the prevalence of symptoms of anxiety among the university teachers [8]. Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20) was used to assess the symptoms of Alexithymia [9]. The communication style inventory developed by Vries [10] was used to assess verbal aggressive and expressive communication styles of the participants. The three scales were converted on 5-point Likert Scale and validated through pilot testing and consulting five prominent educationists. The scales demonstrate more than 0.70 Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficients.

### Findings

Result demonstrates that the presence of the symptoms of anxiety is expressed by mean score of 2.52 whereas the mean score 2.44 show the symptoms of alexithymia among the university teachers who participated in the study. The mean score to show preference for expressive communication style was 2.96 whereas the participants showed mean score of 3.10 to demonstrate their preference for verbal aggressive communication styles.

Results indicate that male university teachers scored relatively higher on alexithymia as compared to female university teachers (Table 1). Similarly the presence of anxiety symptoms is also comparatively higher among the male university teachers than their female colleagues (Table 2).

Genders	Mean	SD	df	t	p
Male	2.50	.498	118	5.885	0.01
Female	2.38	.551			

Table 1: Impacts of gender differences on the prevalence of alexithymia symptoms among university teachers.

Genders	Mean	SD	df	t	p
Male	2.87	0.481	118	5.534	0.000
Female	2.18	0.475			

Table 2: Impacts of gender differences on the prevalence of anxiety symptoms among university teachers.

Genders	Mean	SD	df	t	p
Male	2.21	0.240	118	30.490	0.000
Female	3.72	0.289			

Table 3: Impacts of gender differences on the preference of expressive communication style among university teachers.

Genders	Mean	SD	df	t	P
Male	3.87	0.236	118	30.886	0.000
Female	2.34	0.305			

Table 4: Impacts of gender differences on the preference of verbal aggressive communication style among university teachers.

	Alexithymia	Anxiety	Expressiveness	Verbal Aggression
Alexithymia	1			
Anxiety	0.287*	1		
Expressiveness	0.254*	0.396*	1	
Verbal Aggression	0.478*	0.176*	0.188*	1

Note: \*correlation coefficient is significant at the level of 0.01.

Table 5: Pearson correlation coefficients revealing relationship among the prevalence of symptoms of alexithymia and anxiety and preference for expressive and verbal aggressive communication styles among university teachers.

Results showed that female university teachers comparatively more prefer expressive communication styles than their male colleagues (Table 3). The preference of verbal aggressive communication style is however comparatively higher among the male university teachers (Tables 4 and 5).

Correlation matrix demonstrated significant and direct correlations among the all variables. Symptoms of alexithymia have significant and direct correlation with the symptoms of anxiety ( $r=0.287$ ), Expressiveness ( $r=0.254$ ) and verbal aggression ( $r=0.478$ ). The symptoms of anxiety have significant and direct association with expressiveness ( $r=0.396$ ) and verbal aggression ( $r=0.176$ ). The expressive and verbal aggressive communication styles are also significantly and direct correlated with the r value of .188.

### Discussion and Conclusions

Major purpose of the research was to investigate the prevalence of the symptoms of alexithymia and anxiety among university teachers and its relationships with their preference of communication styles. We found that the presence of the symptoms of anxiety is higher than the presence of the symptoms of alexithymia among the university teachers included in the sample. Similarly the preference for verbal aggressive communication style is comparatively higher among the university teachers than their preference for expressive communication style. The results of this study are consistent with the findings of Ameen et al. who find that majority of teachers faced teaching anxiety [2]. They reported that many teachers experience the physical symptoms of anxiety

and other feel psychological reactions such as apprehension. So, this research supported the hypothesis that the teachers suffer from anxiety, it may be under the symptoms of physical anxiety or may be due to psychological reactions.

Findings reveal that male university teachers have comparatively higher symptoms of alexithymia as compared to female university teachers. Similarly, the presence of anxiety symptoms is also comparatively higher among the male university teachers than their female colleagues. Previous research also support these findings [1]. Wang and Zhang investigated level of anxiety and state anxiety with the relation of gender and environment among school teachers. They concluded that presence of anxiety and state anxiety is comparatively higher among the male teachers than their female colleagues.

Findings reveal that female university teachers comparatively more prefer expressive communication styles than their male colleagues. The preference of verbal aggressive communication style is however comparatively higher among the male university teachers. Correlation matrix demonstrated significant and direct correlations among the all variables. Symptoms of alexithymia have significant and direct correlation with the symptoms of anxiety, expressiveness and verbal aggression. The symptoms of anxiety have significant and direct association with expressiveness and verbal aggression. The expressive and verbal aggressive communication styles are also significantly and directly correlated.

There is a significant positive correlation between alexithymia and anxiety among university teachers was found. Furthermore, this study found that male experience high level of alexithymia as compared to female teachers. However, current study additionally concluded that females scored high on communication style of expressiveness and male scored high on verbal aggression.

This is just the area to explore the anxiety, alexithymia and interpersonal communication styles among university teachers. Researchers can analyze other psychological issues like depression, level of self-esteem, life satisfaction etc. In future, communication styles as

personality predictors can be evaluated. On the base of demographical variables level of anxiety can be examined. Positive and negative effects of psychological issues can be studied. Communication styles can be studied in all the educational faculty members of university and other educational staff. The findings of this study will invite the new researchers to work on communication styles on the base of gender discriminations, experience, social environment and socio-economic status.

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