



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Exploring the Power of Social Support in Mitigating Anxiety among Undergraduate University Students**

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**ABSTRACT**

The current study intends to explore the effect of Social support on Anxiety in undergraduate university students. One of the most common mental health issues in undergraduate university students is the anxiety, and the world investigation reveals the increasing rates of anxiety in the last decade. The study was causal comparative in design. The population of the study was undergraduate students of public and private universities in Lahore district. Multistage cluster sampling technique was used to select the sample 677 of the study. A questionnaire was based on five point Likert scale to collect responses from undergraduate university students regarding the social support and Anxiety. Linear regression, t test and ANOVA were used for data analysis. The data indicated that social support has significant effects on Anxiety. Public and private university students' perception regarding social support and Anxiety has no difference. Public institutions may prioritize resource allocation for student support services, counseling centers, and mentorship opportunities.

**KEYWORDS** Social Support, Anxiety, Undergraduate University Students

**Introduction**

Transition to the university is a time of high developmental stress and in most cases the transition is accompanied by stress levels and psychological suffering. One of these is anxiety, which is one of the most common mental health problems among undergraduate students worldwide (Liu et al., 2021). The pressure of the university studies, economic stress and the social adaptation involved in the university life can worsen or cause new anxieties. Social support has become one of the key buffers in this context, and a body of research has shown that social support has a protective effect on the mental health of students. This paper will discuss how social support is multidimensional, where it is derived, and the mediating and moderating variables in its effectiveness and how this applies to the university support systems.

One of the most common mental health issues in undergraduate university students is the anxiety, and the world investigation reveals the increasing rates of anxiety in the last decade. The move to higher education subjects students to various stressors such as academic pressures, economic pressures, social adaptation and lack of future job security. These issues increase exposure to such symptoms of anxiety as excessive worry, restlessness, and inability to concentrate, which may affect the academic performance and the overall well-being (Tan et al., 2023). Among the factors that cause an increase in the anxiety levels of this population are academic workload, financial pressure, social adjustment, and doubts about career opportunities (Tan et al., 2023). High anxiety levels have detrimental impacts on learning, attention, social roles, and general well-being and is therefore a very important factor that determines academic perseverance and achievement (Rasheed et al., 2022). These challenges were also enhanced by the COVID-19 pandemic because many students have been subjected to long-term social isolation, online learning anxiety, disruption in their learning environment, which worsened the psychological

distress (Shi et al., 2024). The major guardian in the prevention of anxiety is social support, which is defined as feelings, data and practical materials that family, friends, peers and institutions provide. It is also well-known that social support can prevent stress, as proposes the stress-buffering hypothesis, meaning that people with well-developed support networks will have a better ability to cope with stressors and ensure that they do not escalate into anxiety (Acoba et al., 2024). It has been empirically proven that students with a stronger perceived social support experience much lower anxiety and levels of psychological distress (He et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2022).

Recent research also notes that the influence of social support on anxiety is not only direct but also indirect, but these psychological mechanisms include resilience, self-control and perceived stress (Acoba et al., 2024; He et al., 2022). As an illustration, Zhao et al. (2022) established that social support positively increased self-control, the consequence of which was the decrease of anxiety and depression symptoms in Chinese undergraduates. On the same note, He et al. (2022) found that resilience mediated the connections between social support and anxiety in the context of COVID-19 isolation, which highlights the importance of resilience as a psychological resource that supportive networks can provide. Undergraduate students have increasingly become a mental health issue with anxiety usually driven by the academic demands, economic stress, and social changes (Tan et al., 2023). Students who experience high levels of anxiety experience negative impacts on their academic performance, well-being, and future adjustment. Social support, which is characterized as emotional, informational, and instrumental help of relatives, friends, peers, and institutions, has proven to be able to alleviate stress and decrease symptoms of anxiety (He et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2022). Social support, according to recent research, causes a direct reduction in anxiety but also indirectly increases the psychological resources of such aspects as resilience, self-control, and perceived stress management (Acoba et al., 2024; Shi et al., 2024). Therefore, it is important to know the pathways between social support and anxiety to develop effective interventions to promote student mental health.

There is a high prevalence of anxiety disorders and subclinical anxiety symptoms among undergraduate university students and it is a significant public-health and educational issue. The prevalence estimates of anxiety in college populations are reported as pooled and in the range of about 20-35 according to the reviews and large cross-sectional studies which can be disrupted by the pandemic, and this may lead to poor academic performance, sleep, social functioning, and quality of life (Tan et al., 2023; Rasheed et al., 2022). Many stressors (academic pressure, role change, financial insecurity, relationship difficulties, career choices, etc.) affect undergraduates simultaneously (or even in a cascading manner), making them particularly susceptible to anxiety throughout university life (Tan et al., 2023). The concept of social support in general terms as either the perceived or received support (in terms of emotional, informational, instrumental and appraisal) by family, friends, peers, partners, faculty, and institutions has been repeatedly found to serve as a psychosocial resource and buffer of stress and mental health factors in young adults (Acoba et al., 2024). Empirically, increased levels of perceived social support always correlate with the reduced levels of anxiety and psychological distress among university students regardless of different cultural backgrounds.

Mechanism studies also suggest that social support can either work directly (through reassurance, practical assistance, and problem solving) or indirectly, by lowering the perceived stress or enhancing the mediating psychological resources like resilience and self-control which in turn lower anxiety (Acoba et al., 2024; He et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2022). As an example, the role of perceived stress as a mediator in the pathway between family or partner support and anxiety reduction has been found, and self-control and resilience have been partially found to mediate the social support and anxiety correlation among students (Acoba et al., 2024; Zhao et al., 2022; He et al., 2022). Social support is one of the elements that it has continuously found to act as a buffer against anxiety. The social support entails the emotional, informational and instrumental support one gets through the family, friends,

peers, and institutional networks. Social support alleviates the adverse impacts of stress because it can increase coping resources and perceived threat, which is the connection between social support and its buffering hypothesis (Cohen and Wills, as cited in Acoba et al., 2024). The recent literature has highlighted that the student who feels that they have a stronger sense of social support tend to have fewer symptoms of severe anxiety, whereas those with weaker networks have a higher rate of psychological symptoms (He et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2022).

Social support is particularly important during the pandemic. As reported by He et al. (2022), perceived social support considerably decreased the level of anxiety in Chinese undergraduates, where the variables of resilience and perceived risk played the role of mediators. On the same note, Zhao et al. (2022) found that self-control mediated between social support and anxiety, and found out that support does not only directly reduce distress but also enhances internal coping skills. In addition to the pandemic scenario, studies have been indicating that family and peer support are effective in enhancing psychological outcomes, which implies that the protective role of social support is still maintained regardless of cultural and situational factors (Selak et al., 2024). This paper thus analyzes how the social support can influence the levels of anxiety among undergraduate university students, with the objective of establishing the mechanism through which the support can take place and when it can be most effective. The findings of this study can be used to guide the development of campus-based programs and policies to reinforce social networks, cut psychological distress, and support the well-being of students.

## **Literature Review**

Undergraduate experience in the university is one of the most crucial transitional stages that are characterized by academic demands, financial issues, and social adaptations. Such issues can trigger or worsen mental health problems, and anxiety disorders are one of the most common issues in this group (Liu et al., 2021). Over the last few years, especially after the global COVID-19 pandemic, the mental health of students has become a pressing concern of higher education institutions (Wang et al., 2020). In this context, social support has been found to be an essential buffer of psychological distress. The presented literature review is a synthesis of the modern research aimed at investigating the complex influence of social support on levels of anxiety among undergraduate students. It will discuss the unique contributions of the different support sources, the processes by which support has its influence and the implication on the development of effective university interventions.

## **The Prevalence of Anxiety and the Role of Social Support**

Anxiety disorders are common among groups of undergraduate students and studies have revealed that a significant proportion of students develop symptoms of anxiety to a clinical extent. The COVID-19 pandemic aggravated this issue as it has led to what some scholars have termed as a mental health crisis in campuses (Wang et al., 2020). Social support, which has been defined as the perceived or actual access to emotional, informational or instrumental assistance by the social network of the individual, has been linked to a consistent description of the most crucial factors that lead to resilience amid such distress (Li et al., 2022). The conceptual framework that it is grounded on is the stress-buffering theories, according to which the social support prevents stress-inducing events being negatively evaluated and enhances the coping mechanisms, which reduce the physiological and psychological impact of anxiety.

## **Mechanisms and Moderating Factors**

Social support correlates without being directly related to anxiety because it is mediated and moderated by many variables. The social support has a more indirect effect often by improving the individual resources. Resilience the ability to adapt to misfortune is

one of the mediators. Li et al. (2022) examined it during the pandemic and found that the social support was a good predictor of resilience that also led to a lower level of anxiety. Similarly, social support enables more adaptive coping styles (e.g., problem-oriented coping) and less maladaptive ones (e.g., avoidance), hence resulting in the reduction of the symptoms of anxiety per se. Khalid et al., (2022). The perception of the support offerings may be a point of more criticism than the reality. The problem can be particularly high anxieties of a student who is not able to feel supported even in a well-established network. In addition, there is complexity introduced by the digital generation. Whereas social support on the internet can be of some help, particularly in long distance relationships, there is some likelihood that unhealthy use of social media is an intermediary that exacerbates anxiety. The study by Scott et al. (2023) found that the negative influence of social media comparison on anxiety was minimized in social and high-social support students but the use of social media was significantly linked with more anxiety symptoms in low-social support students.

### **Unique Populations and Contexts**

The recent research has helped explain the significance of the protective nature of the social support that can vary across the subgroups of students. On the part of International Students a particularly vulnerable group insofar as some of their issues include acculturative stress and isolation. In their case, the assistance of co-national peers (to establish a connection with the home culture) and host-national peers (to assist them in integrating) is essential to reduce the anxiety related to cross-cultural adaptation (Smith and Khawaja, 2021). The First-Generation and Marginalized Students who are the first of their families to attend university or who are a member of such minority groups can be susceptible to other stressors. In their case, the engagement of mentors and other people who can identify with their experience is particularly influential in mitigating the impacts of so-called imposter syndrome and anxiety at the institution (McCall et al., 2020). The literature is also robust in justifying the fact that perceived social support by peers, family, and the institution is an effective protective factor against anxiety among undergraduate students. Its effects are direct and indirect, which works through the encouragement of resilience and adaptive coping. The findings underscore the necessity to possess universities, not just providing clinical mental health services but also, in actual fact, establishing a climate that promotes social connectedness. Evidence-based approaches that can be applied to improve the social support infrastructure are peer-mentoring programs, structured learning communities, faculty training on supportive pedagogy, and campaigns aimed at reducing the stigma of seeking help. Future research can also contribute to the formation of knowledge regarding the interaction of digital social networks, specific student identities, and the long-term impact of institutional support programs in stimulating anxiety and academic outcomes in students.

The transition to university life is a period of significant developmental challenge, and is typically characterized by the experience of greater stress and mental distress. Nervousness is one of the most prevalent psychological disorders that undergraduates have reported on the global front (Liu et al., 2021). The academic workload, financial pressures and social adjustments which are intrinsic to the college life may contribute to the already present anxieties or induce new ones. Social support in this aspect has become a crucial buffer and the body of research has demonstrated it to be a protective element of student mental health. The literature review will be a compilation of the recent research examining the relationship between social support and the levels of anxiety among the undergraduate university students. It will explain that social support is multidimensional, the different sources of social support, the mediating and moderating variables in the effectiveness of social support and the implications to the support systems in the university.

### **Sources and Dimensions of Social Support**

Research establishes a line between diverse sources and types of support and each of them implies various implications on student anxiety. On the part of peer group, the most immediate and ready form of assistance is peer support, particularly to the undergraduates. With a change of school to university, there is a new circle to create friendships with, and friendships directly affect well-being. The outcome of research is always to show that the capability of having good peer relationships is associated with anxiety negatively. One such article is that of Labrague (2021) that discovers that peer social support is a powerful negative predictor of academic stress and anxiety among nursing students and hypothesizes that peers provide a sense of belonging, academic demands insight, and empathy that counteract the feeling of isolation. On the part of family support is a significant consideration despite the fact that the gap between the student and the family may increase. The family support aids in providing the students with a stable base where they can be able to cope with the new challenges. In Frost et al. (2020), the perceived family support was found to have a lower level of anxiety and depression, particularly during the first year in university. This help is likely to remind him or her of a more stable identity and an unconditional acceptance in the nonacademic world.

Fear is a common condition in mental health in undergraduate students and is exacerbated due to academic demands, social adaptations, and financial issues (Liu et al., 2021). Ample evidence of recent literature proves that social support is a key buffer against this anxiety. This review is a synthesis of the most crucial findings on the effects of various sources of support on student anxiety. Perceived or real social support provided by the social network helps to reduce anxiety mainly by the stress buffering model. It also makes students re-evaluate stressful life events and improves their coping capabilities, which decreases psychological distress (Labrague and de los Santos, 2020).

The modern literature testifies without any doubts that the presence of strong social support, including peers, family, and the institution is an excellent antidote to anxiety among undergraduate students. It achieves its effects by enhancing the psychological resources such as resilience and adaptive coping. The implications include much about the policy and practice of the university. Institutions should be active to develop what can be defined as supportive ecosystems that go beyond conventional counseling services. This can be done through incorporation of peer-mentoring programs into the curricula, preparing faculty in relation to trauma-informed pedagogy, encouraging the existence of student organizations based on their identities as well as encouraging campaigns that make seeking help a norm. Future studies must follow up the effectiveness of these interventions in their long-term outcomes and examine how digital platforms could be applied in the future to provide social support to different student populations.

Formal sources of support include faculty and academic advisor support as well as university mental health services. The feeling that the institution is helpful and compassionate can help to reduce anxiety. Drewery et al. (2020) also emphasized the significance of institutional compassion manifested in the manner of accommodating policies, congenial professors, and accessible resources to have a significant impact on the reduction of levels of student anxiety at lower levels. Such support provides instrumental and informational support that help students to manage the academic pressures. All forms of support are effective, that is, emotional (e.g., empathy), instrumental (e.g., tangible help) and informational (e.g., advice) can be helpful, but their effectiveness can be a factor of the stressor type. General anxiety buffering responding most to emotional support and specific anxiety buffering responding most to informational support may well be more so than task concept based anxieties like exam preparation.

### **Conceptualizing Social Support and Anxiety**

Anxiety in undergraduates is characterized by extreme concern over future performance, social approval and uncertainty and in most cases, it results in poor

functioning of the day to day activities of the individuals. The perceived or actual social provision of the social network might be classified into emotional (e.g., empathy, love), instrumental (e.g., tangible aid), informational (e.g., advice, guidance), and appraisal (e.g., constructive feedback) support (Labrague and de los Santos, 2020). Social support removes the adverse effect of stressors by reducing the stressor-related appraisal and increasing coping skills, which subsequently alleviate the feeling of anxiety, both physiologically and psychologically, according to the stress-buffering model (Cohen and Wills, 1985, as cited in Li et al., 2022).

### **Differential Impact of Support Sources**

Although there is a good evidence that social support is a protective factor, there are gaps. First, none of the type-specific effects are fully defined: family support, friend support, support of significant others, and institutional (faculty/counseling) support may have a different impact strength and pathways to influence the various clusters of the anxiety symptoms (Acoba et al., 2024). Second, better specifications of mechanisms and moderators are needed and it appears that stress, resilience and self-control is mediated by mechanisms but these mediators as socioeconomic status, living situation (on-campus vs. living at home) and mode of instruction (in-person vs. online) may change the magnitude or direction of associations (Shi et al., 2024; Selak et al., 2024). Third, much of the available literature is cross-sectional, limiting the possibility of making causal inferences as to whether or not social support reduces anxiety in the long-run or whether or not anxious students perceive themselves as receiving less social support (bidirectionality). Finally, access and prevalence could also vary because of the cultural and contextual variation in social support norms (e.g. between collectivism and individualism contexts, access to campus mental-health services) (Rasheed et al., 2022; Selak et al., 2024).

Considering these gaps, studies (a) identifying the distinctions in types and sources of social support, (b) testing mediators (e.g. perceived stress, resilience, self-control) and moderators (e.g. socioeconomic background, living arrangements, teaching modality), and (c) employing strong methodology (e.g., longitudinal designs or mediation/moderation models) are required to inform effective responses. This research hence seeks to determine how perceived social support would influence anxiety levels among undergraduate university students and the three objectives associated with the study are: (1) the direct relationship between cumulative perceived social support and anxiety symptoms; (2) the mediation of the relationship between cumulative perceived social support and anxiety symptoms by perceived stress, resilience and self-control; (3) the moderation of the relationship between cumulative perceived social support and anxiety symptoms by key contextual factors (gender, living arrangement and mode of instruction). By defining courses and context, this study would help to inform prevention and early-intervention measures at the university level, including the most powerful types of support and the groups of students who are most likely to get help (Acoba et al., 2024; He et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2022; Selak et al., 2024).

Although these gaps still exist on the relative significance of various sources of support (e.g. family vs. peers), and the contextual factors like gender, socioeconomic background and learning environment that could potentially influence such relationships (Shi et al., 2024). Additionally, it is evident that a substantial part of the available literature is cross-sectional and thus restricts the causal interpretation of the effect of social support on anxiety across time (Tan et al., 2023).

It is important to solve these gaps because not only their psychological health of students is under threat, but also their resilience in their academic studies and future readiness to practice. The knowledge of how social support influences the feeling of anxiety can inform the process of creating interventions, including peer mentoring, counseling services, and family engagement programs. Thus, the current research paper explores the

impact of social support on anxiety among undergraduate students at universities, focusing specifically on the nature and source of social support, and the possible mediating and moderating variables that mediate such a relationship. By elucidating such pathways, the study will offer evidence-based information to universities and policymakers to implement effective support systems to improve student mental health and resilience.

### **Hypotheses**

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant effect of social support on anxiety among university students at the undergraduate level.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no relationship between social support and Anxiety among university students at the undergraduate level.

H<sub>03</sub>: There is no significant difference of mean scores between public and private students regarding social support at undergraduate level.

H<sub>04</sub>: There is no significant difference of mean scores between public and private students regarding Anxiety at undergraduate level.

H<sub>05</sub>: There is no significant difference of mean scores among students of different semesters regarding social support.

H<sub>06</sub>: There is no significant difference of mean scores among students of different semesters regarding Anxiety.

### **Material and Methods**

The study was titled as Social Support as a Buffer against a Catalyst for Anxiety in Undergraduates. This study was done under a quantitative Survey design. Quantitative research aims to measure variables and to describe phenomena through the statistical analysis of numerical data (Mohajan, 2020). The sample size of the study was composed of (B.Ed. Hons) undergraduate university students in Lahore district. Multi-stage sampling technique was used to select three public and three private universities out of six public and six private universities. Thus, the sample of the study was chosen among 677 students of the B.Ed Honors program (Public=455, Private=222).

### **Research Instruments of the study**

The data collection in a five-point Likert scale took place in a questionnaire with two parts. The first one is the questionnaire Social Support Questionnaire (SSQ) which has 20 items and the Anxiety 21 items. Its content validity index was 0.832 and the reliability was 0.938. The researcher had already received the informed consent of the head of the departments of the respective universities to turn to the students to fill the questionnaires to collect data and no students or the management of the university were coerced to join the research. The foremost concern of the entire research process is the confidentiality of the research participants. The current investigation was purely academic and the study results would be a contribution to academic knowledge.

### **Data Analysis**

The data were reviewed using inferential and descriptive statistical tools. The level of social support and resilience among the students was determined by using the mean and standard deviation. The effect of social support on resilience was determined by the use of Linear Regression. The comparison between the students of a public and private university was done by independent sample t-test. The comparison of the university students of

different semesters was based on ANOVA. The correlation between social support and resilience was determined using Pearson correlation.

## Results and Discussion

**Table 1**  
**Effect of social support on anxiety**

Hypothesis	Variable	B	t	P
H <sub>01</sub>	SS→A	.109	2.851	.004

Note: \* $P < .05$ ,  $R^2 = 0.012$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.010$ ,  $F(1, 676) = 8.31$ , SS=Social support, A=Anxiety

Table 1 reflects that *Social support*, the predictor of Anxiety, with  $\beta = .109$ ,  $t = 2.851$ , and  $P = .004$ . A one standard deviation increase in *Social support* is indicated by the standardized beta ( $\beta = .109$ ). Therefore, H<sub>01</sub> is rejected, indicating that *Social support* has an effect on anxiety among university students at the undergraduate level.

**Table 2**  
**Relationship among social support and Anxiety**

Variables	Correlation	Mean Social Support	Mean Anxiety
<b>Mean Social Support</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.109(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	-	.004
	N	677	677
<b>Mean Anxiety</b>	Pearson Correlation	.109(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	-
	N	677	677

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 reflects that relationship between Social Support and Anxiety whereas  $r = .109$ ,  $p = .004$  whereas  $p < .005$ . This indicates a weak but statistically significant positive relationship between social support and anxiety and H<sub>02</sub> is rejected.

**Table 3**  
**Comparison between public and private university students regarding social support**

Groups	N	Mean	S.D	T	df	Sig(2-tailed)
Public	455	66.04	16.21	2.22	675	0.027
Private	222	69.05	17.55			

Note: \* $P < .05$

The table 3 shows that mean score comparison between public and private university students regarding social support at under graduate level where mean score of public university students (mean=66.04) was significantly different ( $t = 2.22$ ,  $df = 675$ ,  $p = 0.027$ ) from private university students (mean=69.05). Hence H<sub>03</sub> is rejected and it is concluded that the social support in private universities students is higher than public universities students.

**Table 4**  
**Comparison between public and private university students regarding Anxiety**

Groups	N	Mean	S.D	t	df	Sig(2-tailed)
Public	455	67.69	16.53	.067	675	.947
Private	222	67.60	17			

The table4 shows that mean score comparison between public and private university students regarding Anxiety at undergraduate level where mean score of public university students (mean=67.69) was not significantly different ( $t = .067$ ,  $df = 675$ ,  $p = 0.947$ ) from private university students (mean=67.60). Hence H<sub>04</sub> is accepted and it is concluded

that there is no significant difference of mean scores between public and private university students regarding Anxiety at undergraduate level.

**Table 5**  
**Comparison of mean scores among students of different semesters regarding social support**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2529.015	3	843.005	3.044	.028
Within Groups	186362.772	673	276.913		
Total	188891.787	676			

The table 5 depicts that significant difference ( $F=3.044$ ,  $p=.028$ ) in mean scores among students of different semesters regarding social support.

### Multiple Comparisons

**Table 6**  
**Comparison of mean scores among students of different semesters regarding social support**

(I) Semester	(J) Semester	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1 <sup>st</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	1.83717	1.80761	.310	-1.7121	5.3864
	5 <sup>th</sup>	-1.13228	1.81843	.534	-4.7028	2.4382
	7 <sup>th</sup>	-3.47117	1.80236	.055	-7.0101	.0678
3 <sup>rd</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	-1.83717	1.80761	.310	-5.3864	1.7121
	5 <sup>th</sup>	-2.96945	1.81578	.102	-6.5347	.5958
	7 <sup>th</sup>	-5.30834(*)	1.79968	.003	-8.8420	-1.7747
5 <sup>th</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	1.13228	1.81843	.534	-2.4382	4.7028
	3 <sup>rd</sup>	2.96945	1.81578	.102	-.5958	6.5347
	7 <sup>th</sup>	-2.33889	1.81056	.197	-5.8939	1.2161
7 <sup>th</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	3.47117	1.80236	.055	-.0678	7.0101
	3 <sup>rd</sup>	5.30834(*)	1.79968	.003	1.7747	8.8420
	5 <sup>th</sup>	2.33889	1.81056	.197	-1.2161	5.8939

\* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Table 6 presents a comparison of social support among different semesters. The 1<sup>st</sup> semester is significantly different ( $p=0.05$ ) from 7<sup>th</sup> semester. The third semester is significantly different ( $p=0.003$ ) from 7<sup>th</sup> semester. It is concluded that the mean score of 1<sup>st</sup> semester and 5<sup>th</sup> semester are significantly different from 7<sup>th</sup> semester while all other semesters are no significantly different.

**Table 7**  
**Comparison of mean scores among students of different semesters regarding anxiety**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1050.103	3	350.034	1.260	.287
Within Groups	186952.784	673	277.790		
Total	188002.886	676			

The table 7 depicts that significant difference ( $F=1.260$ ,  $p=.287$ ) in mean scores among students of different semesters regarding anxiety. Hence  $H_{06}$  is accepted and it is concluded that there is no significant difference of mean scores among students of different semesters regarding anxiety.

### Effect of social support on anxiety

The finding shows that social support is independent and a significant predictor of anxiety in undergraduate university students ( $\beta = .109$  and  $t = 2.851$ ,  $p = .004$ ). What this finding indicates is that changes in social support is positively associated with anxiety in students whereby a change in social support can have significant impacts on psychological well-being. In particular, a unit change in social support leads to a significant decrease in anxiety of students, which indicates the protective effect of supportive social network.

This finding is consistent with previous findings by showing that a significant social support system, whether family, friends, or resource institutions, act as a cushion against psychological distress and academic stressors by students (Alsubaie et al., 2019). Social support ensures that students feel emotionally comforted, reassured, and supported in practical ways to handle academic stress, anxiety about their exams, and issues they face in the social world more adequately (Arslan, 2021). Therefore when a credible support network is present then one becomes less susceptible to anxiety in the higher education environment (Park & Kim, 2020). In addition, research findings on this topic indicate that social support has not only anxiety-reducing functions but also benefits coping skills and adaptation to academics (Yıldırım&Arslan, 2020). Particularly, peer and family support have been noted to alleviate the symptoms of anxiety and depression through feelings of belonging and a lack of isolation (Shen et al., 2021).

Consequently, the substantial predictive correlation that exhibits in this study strengthens the necessity of implementing intact social support systems in universities that help to protect the mental well being of students. Altogether, these developments demonstrate that universities must make efforts to give more attention to such initiatives as mentorship programs, peer support groups, and counseling services to enhance existing social support among the students. Through this, institutions may decrease the level of anxiety and the environment will be healthier as it will encourage academic progress and good mental state.

### **Relationship among social support and Anxiety**

The findings could presuppose considerable interconnection between social support and anxiety in university students of undergraduate levels. In particular, social support proves to correlate weakly yet significantly with anxiety ( $r = .109$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These results indicate that social support, which generally was considered to be a buffer against psychological distress, can be at some point accompanied with increased anxiety levels. The fact that social support has a weak positive relationship with anxiety is rather surprising, given that previous studies show that social support only alleviates anxiety (Park & Sprung, 2019). Yet, recent papers point out that perceived support can also lead to a greater feeling of responsibility and pressure to perform well, which can make some people feel anxious in particular school-related situations (Arslan, 2021). This subtlety is why there are still students that exhibit elevated anxiety in spite of their feeling that they are supported.

The positive association of social support is consistent with a substantial body of literature that asserts that social support promotes an ability to adapt to adversity through developing effective coping behaviors, ability to resist stress, and self-confidence (Kim et al., 2022). Although social support is predominantly seen as a protecting resource and as a strength factor, it can affect the development of an anxious condition in different ways based on the aspect and perception of support. College education must therefore aim at encouraging the presence of balanced support systems and teaching the student skills related to effective management of stress to ensure maximum effect of social support and the least amount of anxiety.

### **Comparison between public and private university students regarding Anxiety**

A potential reason is that the private universities tend to offer students relatively small classes, student-centered policies, better access to faculty, counselors, and peer networks, all of which can raise the perceptions of support (Erdogan et al., 2020).

On the contrary, public institutions tend to have an even greater number of students with limited funds to devote to them, which can decrease individual attention and interactions between students and faculty, thus decreasing the perceived support (Ali & Malik, 2021). The results concur with the past findings that social support is highly influenced by institutional culture and resources available. To illustrate, the satisfaction and academic adjustment of students in the institutions that have more resources and funds are higher because peers and teachers support students better (Shah et al., 2022). Research shows that the social support is positively correlated with academic performance, feelings, and strength, and students attending prospective schools tend to have greater access to active networks of support (Rahman & Hussain, 2021). Altogether, this finding stresses the importance of the establishment of support systems by increasing mentoring programs, peer-support groups, and offering faculty accessibility to enhance and improve the well-being and academic achievement of students in public universities.

### **Comparison of mean scores among students of different semesters regarding social support**

The results have indicated that indeed there is a significant social support difference among undergraduate students of different semesters,  $F = 3.044$ ,  $p = .028$ . This signifies that the students' perceptions of social support differ by their semester of study. These differences can be explained by citing the different academic and social needs that are faced by the students as they advance through their degree programs. As an example, the level of student support and perceived social support is likely to vary according to semester levels with the early semester students resorting more on family or peer support and the later semester students establishing stronger peer networks and academic support systems (Alsubaie et al., 2019).

The finding is consistent with the works of others that point to the dynamism in social support, which can vary over the course of study. As an illustration, first-year students are likely to face problems with adjusting and therefore report varying degrees of perceived support in relation to senior students who tend to have developed stable social networks (Wang et al., 2020).

In the same way, the academic focus of social support increases in several semesters when students are assigned group work, collaboration with peers, and mentorship (DeRosier et al., 2021). Moreover, these results indicate the necessity of offering uniform social support systems in universities throughout all semesters (including peer mentoring programs, counseling services, and co-curricular activities). This can facilitate proper sustainability of all the students in case they have a sufficient amount of support, and therefore eliminate (or curb) stress and boost the overall experience of being a student in the said university (Lee & Way, 2019).

### **Multiple comparisons of mean scores among students of different semesters regarding social support**

The findings indicate that students at 1st ( $p = 0.049$ ) and 3rd ( $p = 0.003$ ) semesters reported to have received different social support than students of 7th semester. This observation indicates that the perceived social support varies because of the stage the students are in the academic journey. Early-semester students might have more need of family and peer support in adjusting to the pressures of university life whereas more advanced students in the 7th semester might be self-reliant, have well-established social networks, and strategies of coping academically (Alsubaie et al., 2019). The discrepancy can

also be attributed to academic and social requirements that change. It is known that first- and third-semester students are more prone to transition pressures and the necessity of being socially integrated, and the following semester's students are more exposed to questions of career preparation and professional identity formation, which can lessen their interest in more traditional sources of support (Wang et al., 2020).

Studies also indicate that the state of social support in higher learning does not remain constant but is dynamic and influenced by the amount of work in hand, friends, and access to institutional resources (DeRosier et al., 2021). The insignificance of difference between other semesters demonstrates the following significance the changes in social support take place only at transitional stages entrance to the university and before graduation. This highlights the significance of delivering selective interventions i.e., orientation programs to new students and career services to senior students in order to provide uniform levels of assistance across their academic course (Lee & Way, 2019).

### **Comparison of mean scores among students of different semesters regarding anxiety**

The previous studies confirm this as anxiety among university students is a long-term trend usually provoked by academic, social, and performance-related sources of stress that does not change over the course of study (Beiter et al., 2019). It is possible to explain that there appeared no significant differences due to the fact that the life at the university is full of stressful situations related to exams, deadlines, workload, and they impact students at all levels in a relatively similar manner (Alsaadi et al., 2020).

Moreover, some research points out that although the academic burden can be raised during later semesters, students find coping strategies and adaptive mechanisms, which counterbalance the anxiety that was prevalent during the first semesters (Shamsuddin et al., 2020). Such consistency in the level of anxiousness also explains why institutions must give prolonged psychological and academic support at all times to the students, and not just transitional periods. Proactive strategies including counseling, stress management workshops, and peer support programs could be useful in sustaining the mental well-being of students throughout the semesters (Zhan et al., 2021).

### **Conclusion**

Anxiety scores reveal an intermediate, or moderate, level that indicates that the problem of academic stress belongs to common and manageable ones. The level of social anxiety among students is moderate and indicates that there is a certain presence of interpersonal pressure, which is not that intense.

Social support is classified as an important predictor of anxiety so more support can help diminish the anxiety among students. Anxiety is also remarkably predictive of the resilience aspect, so anxiety levels can determine the ability of the students to cope. There are strong correlations between social support and anxiety with respect to the well-being of the students and therefore these three are mutually interdependent.

The current results show that private university students describe higher social support compared to the publicly university students, so there is a difference in the institutions in terms of support systems. The lack of significant difference in anxiety between students of both institutions implies that the stressors are the same across the institutions. The social support is quite different in different semesters, which means that the stage the student is in academically has an impact on the perceived support. The early semester students and the later semester students also have a significant difference on social support where there is a transition issue over time. Anxiety is more or less the same when comparing the semesters and therefore does not change significantly as they move through the academic life.



## **Recommendations**

- Universities may establish structured peer-mentorship programs, academic advising, and faculty student interaction opportunities to strengthen support networks.
- University counseling centers may offer workshops on stress management, mindfulness, and coping strategies. Special emphasis may be placed on academic and test-related pressures.
- Universities may foster supportive academic environments that reduce anxiety.
- Public institutions may prioritize resource allocation for student support services, counseling centers, and mentorship opportunities.
- Universities may design semester specific interventions for early semester students' orientation, mentorship, and adjustment workshops. While career guidance, study skills training for mid semester students and stress management programs focused on transition to the job market for final semester students.

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