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TEST ANXIETY AMONG NEET ASPIRANTS RELOCATING FOR COACHING: A CASE STUDY OF DISTRICT KARGIL IN INDIA

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Keywords	Abstract
Anxiety Levels, Test Anxiety, Test Attempt, NEET Aspirants, Proposed Interventions, Kargil District.	Test anxiety among National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) aspirants for medical studies in India is a debatable issue as every year when the results are announced, a surge of news reports highlights anxiety-related cases involving such aspirants. The present investigation was an attempt in this context with the aim to study the test anxiety in NEET aspirants from Kargil district relocating for coaching and to propose some interventions to some extent. Using a descriptive research methodology, data of 84 students were collected through Driscoll's Westside Test Anxiety Scale (2007) and analyzed accordingly. The findings indicate that 48.8%, of these aspirants experience levels of anxiety ranging from moderately high to extremely high and female aspirants are showing a higher incidence of test anxiety by 7% compared to males. It also indicates that an increase in NEET attempts correlates with a rise in anxiety levels.

1. INTRODUCTION

As noted by Crocq (2015), the study of anxiety can be traced back to ancient Greco-Roman eras, spanning more than two thousand years, highlighting that anxiety disorders have consistently been



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a significant aspect of human existence throughout history. Writers from ancient times, including Hippocrates, Cicero, and Seneca wrote about individuals showing signs that are now understood as anxiety, including unfounded fears and persistent concern. They believed that these symptoms could be linked to a medical condition. Nonetheless, the concept of anxiety has evolved with time, and it is generally accepted that anxiety is more prevalent in the contemporary age especially in young generation. After doing a thorough reading of Muskin (2023)'s review, anxiety can be categorized in four forms like generalized anxiety, panic anxiety, social anxiety and various phobia-related anxieties. Test anxiety which is also known as test anxiety can fall into any of these categories as it depends on the context.

➤ **Test Anxiety**

Test anxiety is a type of performance anxiety that can make it hard to do well on an exam. It is a common response to exams, but it can become a problem when it's so intense that it interferes with studying or performance. As noted by Cherry (2020) from Loma Linda University's School of Medicine, test anxiety can be observed through various physical, cognitive, behavioral, and emotional symptoms. Physically, individuals may experience an increased heart rate, excessive sweating, a dry throat, shaking, feelings of dizziness, overwhelming panic attacks, nausea, or a sensation of queasiness. On the cognitive and behavioral front, this often includes negative self-talk and distorted thinking patterns that lead learners to avoid studying or test environments. Additionally, people may struggle with focus, accompanied by a barrage of rapid thoughts. Emotionally, anxiety related to tests may manifest as diminished self-esteem, symptoms of depression, irritability, a short fuse, a heavy burden, and a constant feeling of hopelessness. This type of anxiety usually stems from high expectations, fear of poor performance, significant pressure to succeed, or an incessant drive for perfection. While it is a common response among students that can feel automatic, excessive anxiety can negatively impact academic performance (Alshareef et al., 2025).

➤ **Effects of Test Anxiety**

Test anxiety affects performance as it can interfere with concentration, memory, and decision-making, which are all important for doing well on exams. It can also lead to students underestimating their ability to answer questions, overestimating the difficulty of the exam, and allocating time poorly. As a result, this disruption leads to reduced academic success, since research indicates a negative relationship between test anxiety and overall educational achievement (Yusefzadeh et al., 2019). According to Jamali et al. (2017), students who face high levels of test anxiety generally perform worse than those who have low anxiety. This type of stress can negatively affect academic performance in various ways, such as disrupting the recall of information, the ability to answer questions, and the skill of critical thinking. It reduces confidence as students may doubt their ability to perform well, even if they have prepared well. They may engage in negative self-talk, such as telling themselves they are not good enough or that they will



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fail etc. Research on test anxiety can help us understand how to manage it and improve performance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for this study encompasses significant articles and papers relevant to the topic. Chakraborty, A. (2023) examined “The Root Causes of Examination Anxiety: Effective Solutions and Recommendations,” emphasizing methods such as relaxation techniques, cognitive-behavioral approaches, skills in time management, and training in study skills that can reduce anxiety and improve academic outcomes. Hafezi & Etemadi (2022) argue that losing a positive academic standing, along with detrimental effects on personality, negatively affects a student’s mental health and leads to heightened anxiety during examinations. Theobald, M. et al. (2022) carried out a study named “Test Anxiety Does Not Predict Exam Performance When Knowledge Is Controlled For: Strong Evidence Against the Interference Hypothesis of Test Anxiety,” revealing that those with high levels of trait anxiety exhibited lower gains in knowledge during the exam preparation process. Trifoni & Shahini (2011) conducted research titled “How Does Exam Anxiety Impact University Students’ Performance?” Their findings suggest that students often face test anxiety, which is shown to originate from inadequate preparation, fear of negative evaluation, past unfavorable testing experiences, time pressure, and external stressors as primary factors contributing to test anxiety.

3. RESEARCH GAP

An overview of the survey of literature reveals that so far many studies have been done on test anxiety related issues; however, no research has been done in connection with NEET Anxiety particularly in the context of Kargil District. Therefore, the researchers feel it is important to fill this gap by conducting a study on “Test Anxiety in NEET Aspirants Relocating for Coaching: A Case Study of District Kargil in India”. It is expected that this study will be very useful in providing a clear picture of the existing general level of anxiety among NEET aspirants and subsequently it may be possible to provide suggestions for taking measures.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following objectives were formulated for the present study:

1. To study the level of test anxiety among NEET aspirants from Kargil district enrolled in out-of-district coaching centers.
2. To compare test anxiety between male and female NEET aspirants.
3. To compare the level of test anxiety among first, second and third attempts of NEET aspirants.
4. To propose some interventions to minimize test anxiety issues among the NEET aspirants.



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5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, descriptive/survey method was employed as it describes what exists at present and the collected data were analyzed in a quantitative manner. The descriptive design is often used in market research, social research, health research, politics, and psychology etc.

➤ Population and Sampling

The population of this case study comprised all NEET aspirants from Kargil District enrolled in out-of-district coaching institutes across India. However, data were collected from a sample of 84 students with equal male and female participation, using an online survey method, with participants selected through purposive sampling from different coaching centers located in different states.

➤ Assessment Tool

The Westside Test Anxiety Scale, created by Richard Driscoll in 2007, includes 10 items and was used to collect data. This compact instrument is designed to pinpoint students experiencing anxiety-related challenges who might benefit from targeted interventions to alleviate test anxiety. Regarding data analysis, it was conducted according to the method provided in the scale's manual by the author:

“Test Anxiety Score = (Total of the scores from the 10 questions) ÷ 10.”

The scoring interpretation for the Westside Test Anxiety Scale, as provided by Driscoll (2007), is as follows:

- – 1.9 indicates comfortably low test anxiety
- – 2.5 represents normal or average test anxiety
- 2.5 – 2.9 signifies high normal test anxiety
- – 3.4 reflects moderately high test anxiety (some items scored 4, which indicates high)
- 3.5 – 3.9 denotes high test anxiety (half or more of the items scored 4, which indicates high)
- – 5.0 indicates extremely high anxiety (items scored 4 for high and 5 for extreme).

➤ Statistical Techniques

Statistical tools are important because they help researchers and data analysts for making sense of data. In present study, percentage analysis and graphs/pie charts were prepared to analyze and interpret the collected data.

6. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

The collected data was examined rigorously based on the established goals:

1. To study the level of test anxiety among NEET aspirants from Kargil district enrolled in out-of-district coaching centers



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Table: 01 shows the level of test anxiety among NEET aspirants from Kargil district

Levels of Test Anxiety	No. of Students (N)	Percentage
1.0 – 1.9 indicates <i>Comfortably Low Test Anxiety</i>	16	19.04%
2.0 – 2.5 represents <i>Normal or Average Test-Anxiety</i>	17	20.23%
2.5 – 2.9 signifies <i>High Normal Test-Anxiety</i>	10	11.90%
3.0 – 3.4 reflects <i>Moderately High Test-Anxiety</i>	23	27.38%
3.5 – 3.9 denotes <i>High Test-Anxiety</i>	07	8.33%
4.0 – 5.0 indicates <i>Extremely High Test-Anxiety</i>	11	13.12%
Total	84	100%

From the table shown above, it is clearly evident that the maximum number of students were possessing moderately high test anxiety i.e. 27.38% followed by 20.23% normal test anxiety, 19.04% comfortably low test anxiety, 13.12% extremely high anxiety, 11.90% high normal test anxiety and 8.33% high test anxiety. Briefly mentioning, about 48.8% of these NEET aspirants fall in the range of “Moderately High Anxiety” to “Extremely High Anxiety”.

2. To compare test anxiety between male and female NEET aspirants.

Table: 02 shows comparison of test anxiety b/w male and female NEET aspirants

Levels of Test Anxiety	Male Students (N)	Female Students (N)
1.0 – 1.9 indicates <i>Comfortably Low Test Anxiety</i>	11	05
2.0 – 2.5 represents <i>Normal or Average Test-Anxiety</i>	08	09
2.5 – 2.9 signifies <i>High Normal Test-Anxiety</i>	04	06
3.0 – 3.4 reflects <i>Moderately High Test-Anxiety</i>	13	10
3.5 – 3.9 denotes <i>High Test-Anxiety</i>	01	06
4.0 – 5.0 indicates <i>Extremely High Test-Anxiety</i>	05	06
Total	42	42



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Table 02 shows the comparison of test anxiety between male and female aspirants and it is clearly evident that out of 42 male sampled students, 23 falls in the category of “Comfortably Low Test-Anxiety” to “High Normal Test-Anxiety”. Thus, it can be interpreted that around 55% of male students are normal. In the same way, out of the 42 female sampled students, 20 falls in the range of “Comfortably Low Test-Anxiety” to “High Normal Test-Anxiety” and in this way around 48% of female students comes under normal category.

Among the examined male samples, only 19 students making up 45% fall within the range of “Moderately High Test-Anxiety” to “Extremely High Test-Anxiety”. In contrast, 22 female sampled students i.e. 52% comes under the category of “Moderately High Test-Anxiety” to “Extremely High Test-Anxiety”. This indicates that female students are facing a "High Test Anxiety" rate that is 7% greater than that of their male counterparts.

3. To compare the level of test anxiety among first, second and third attempts of NEET aspirants.

Table: 03 shows difference in the level of test anxiety among 1st, 2nd and 3rd attempts NEET aspirants

Levels of Test Anxiety	First Attempt Students	Second Attempt Students	Third Attempt Students
1.0 – 1.9 indicates <i>Comfortably Low Test Anxiety</i>	08	05	04
2.0 – 2.5 represents <i>Normal or Average Test-Anxiety</i>	06	08	04
2.5 – 2.9 signifies <i>High Normal Test-Anxiety</i>	03	06	04
3.0 – 3.4 reflects <i>Moderately High Test-Anxiety</i>	02	07	09
3.5 – 3.9 denotes <i>High Test-Anxiety</i>	02	03	02
4.0 – 5.0 indicates <i>Extremely High Test-Anxiety</i>	01	04	06
Total	22(26%)	33 (39%)	29 (35%)

The results showed that when it comes to the level of test anxiety for first-time, second time and third time NEET exam takers, the results indicated that of the 22 students attempting the NEET for



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the first time, only 5 students (23%), fell into the category of “Moderately High Test-Anxiety” to “Extremely High Test-Anxiety”. Likewise, of the 33 students taking the second attempt at the NEET, 14 (42 percent), had “Moderately High Test-Anxiety” to “Extremely High Test-Anxiety”. Similarly, of the 29 students attempting the NEET for the third time, 17 students (59%) were placed within the same range of test anxiety. In short, repeating failure and unsuccessful in attempting the problems increases anxiety and the data could also be better represented and compared with a bar graph of the percentages of high-anxiety students across all three groups. This type of information can be understood much clearer with the use of bar graphs. Bar graphs are used for the comparison of one or multiple data categories by utilizing an x- axis and a y- axis. Below is a bar graph which shows the level of test anxiety among 1st, 2nd, and 3rd attempts of NEET exam takers:

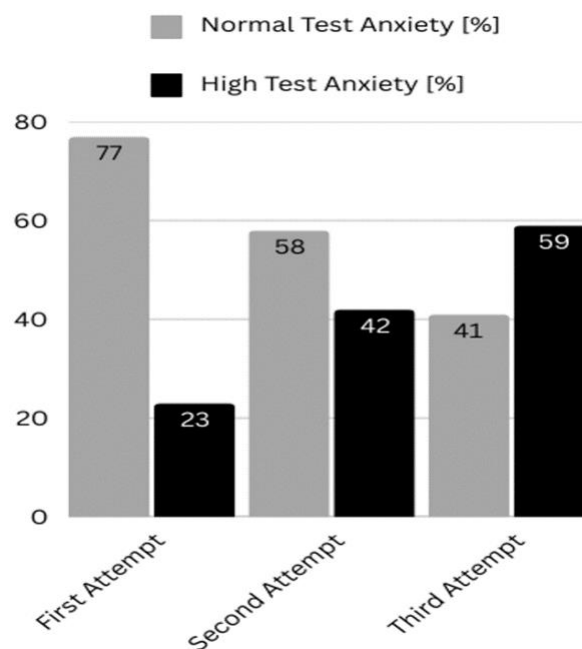


Fig1. Bar Graph showing the level of test anxiety among 1st, 2nd & 3rd attempts NEET aspirants. This bar graph clearly demonstrates an upward trend in anxiety levels corresponding with the number of attempts. Thus, this study validates that an increase in NEET attempt is associated with a rise in anxiety level. So, this trend indicates that NEET candidates are becoming more anxious after each failed attempt, and possibly due to a sense of increased uncertainty; fear of failure or social pressure and so on and so forth.

7. FINDINGS WITH PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS

The major findings of this study in relation with formulated objectives are as under:

- The analysis of the level of test anxiety among NEET aspirants from Kargil district enrolled in out-of-district coaching centers reveals that a substantial portion, 48.8%, of the aspirants

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experience levels of anxiety ranging from moderately high to extremely high, which can detrimentally affect their academic performance and overall well-being.

- Similarly, the comparative study of test anxiety among male and female NEET candidates from the Kargil district reveals a significant gender difference, as female candidates experience test anxiety that is 7% higher than that of their male counterparts.
- Furthermore, a comparison of test anxiety levels among NEET candidates from Kargil district, based on whether they are taking the test for the first, second, or third time, indicates a positive relationship between higher anxiety levels and an increased number of NEET attempts. Therefore, anxiety appears to rise with each successive attempt at the NEET exam, implying that the pressure of repeated attempts significantly contributes to heightened anxiety.

On the basis of the findings of the study, the investigators propose the following interventions in accordance with the well-established works to address the issue of test anxiety:

(i) Organize Trainings for Teachers of Coaching Centers (Casbarro, 2005; Jordan & Lovett, 2025)

Adolescence is a vital stage, and numerous students facing emotional challenges join coaching institutes to prepare for the NEET. Educators aiming to effectively teach these students need to be trained in motivational strategies, innovative teaching methods, and offering compassionate support for emotionally fragile adolescents, particularly those from rural or remote regions. They should be familiar with Casbarro (2005)'s proven techniques for the pre-testing, during-testing, and post-testing phases, which include boosting student confidence and alleviating anxiety through sensitive instruction. In contexts like NEET, where test anxiety is common, teachers should be acquainted with strategies drawing from Jordan & Lovett (2025) such as “desensitizing fears through exposure exercises” and “psycho-education on the Causes of Anxiety”.

(ii) Mastering Relaxation Strategies for Tranquil Minds (Bernstein, 2018; Davis et al., 2000)

Research by Bernstein (2018) and Davis et al. (2000) indicates that simple breathing techniques and muscle relaxation can mitigate anxiety prior to assessments. Students should be encouraged to practice deep belly breathing or engage in tense-and-release body scans right before exams. These brief strategies help to reduce heart rates and soothe anxious thoughts. Incorporate them into daily routines, like short classroom breaks, to enable students to feel more in control and focused during stressful moments.

(iii) Use Simplified Study-materials (Bernstein, 2018)

Preparation for the NEET test often causes students stress and anxiety, particularly due to the complex and overwhelming terminology used in the lectures and study materials, and some researchers point out that language issues are widespread and often perceived as a major barrier. Educators have the opportunity to improve this situation by designing materials that are straightforward: utilizing clear language, providing engaging prompts that encourage critical thinking, and sharing narratives that resonate with students. This strategy enhances comprehension,



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eliminates barriers, and promotes a passion for learning, transforming apprehension into enjoyment.

(iv) Personalized Learning Plans (Tomlinson, 2001; Putwain, 2024)

Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs) have the potential to significantly alleviate anxiety, as supported by Tomlinson (2001) and Putwain (2024). In the process of creating PLPs, students should evaluate their prior attempts, pinpointing aspects that increase anxiety or highlight weaknesses. By concentrating on these areas, individualized strategies such as scaffolding, tasks based on interests, and adaptable assessments can be incorporated, which helps build confidence and engagement. For students repeating the NEET exam, such plans can make studying feel less daunting, tackling both emotional and academic hurdles. This strategy fosters a nurturing learning atmosphere, reducing stress and improving performance.

(v) Study Skills and Time Management (Guillebeau, 2025; Kanar, 2013)

Students preparing for NEET frequently experience overwhelming anxiety due to last-minute studying and the feeling of time slipping away. By mastering effective study techniques such as active recall and spaced repetition and wisely managing their time, learners can break free from procrastination, building a sense of calm confidence. Guillebeau (2025) reveals the misconceptions surrounding time pressure through organized planning, while Kanar (2013) provides students with self-management strategies to convert anxiety into composed readiness, smoothing their journey toward success.

(vi) Adopt Retrieval Practice not Re-reading (Agarwal & Bain, 2019; Busch, 2025)

Active learning is used in this course through methods like retrieval practice, which has been shown to create an atmosphere that encourages students to take responsibility for retrieving their own knowledge from memory as opposed to reviewing their notes. In addition to creating a feeling of confidence in their ability to succeed on tests, this approach also helps to alleviate test anxiety; however, it is a versatile tool: it creates an environment where students are confident in their abilities and will perform better on tests, supported by research in cognitive psychology adapted for use in education.

(vii) Test Preparation Environment (Beilock, 2010)

Conduct regular mock tests as often as possible, e.g., at least once a week etc. to expose the students to the structure and nature of questions that they will experience in the actual NEET exam. In addition to providing constructive feedback and suggestions regarding their academic performance, try to provide them with some guidance on how to manage their stress and maintain their emotional well-being and stability before, during and after each mock test.

(viii) Form Peer Support Groups (Carter, Cushing & Kennedy, 2009)

A peer support group can help reduce feelings of isolation as well as give members with shared experiences useful information to assist them with their test anxieties. Members of a peer support group can also provide one another with emotional support, share helpful techniques for managing test anxiety, and create a safe and supportive environment to discuss emotions.



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(ix) Success Narratives and Supportive Interventions (Butler et al., 2010; Putwain, 2024)

The stress related to exams that is common among NEET candidates may be alleviated through the use of both mentorship-based success stories and counseling initiatives. Mentoring sessions conducted with fellow students or seniors who are also successful in clearing the NEET provide a platform for sharing strategies and experience of how to manage stress and anxiety and enable aspirants to identify achievable pathways to success (Butler et al., 2010). Organizations should similarly offer evidence-based programs such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), via workshops and easily accessible counseling options (Putwain, 2024). These regularly occurring sessions will assist in addressing irrational fears, negative thought patterns, stress due to performance, and fear of failure in order to promote confidence and resiliency in a supportive environment.

(x) Stop the Comparison and Believe in Self (Dweck, 2006; Burns, 1980)

Teach students to replace negative thinking with a positive mindset and help them stop comparing to other people but instead they need to compare to where they were before. Show them to rely on their work and their dedication and show them how to be efficient when studying.

(xi) Parental and Community Involvement (Dorland, 2011)

Build support for parents and community involvement as partners to identify signs of anxiety (restlessness, sleep issues, etc.) and then have them move from pressure to encouragement. Utilize the book “Overcoming Test Anxiety” by Jordan and Lovett (2025) which contains family modules to help reduce stress due to pressure, and “Exam Stress? No Worries!” by Dorland (2007) that gives parents ways to create a calm environment without adding additional expectations. Establish a network of support to alleviate feelings of being alone and build confidence in your ability to perform well on tests.

8. CONCLUSION

This investigation on NEET aspirants from Kargil district has established some significant trends and disparities. Notably, 48.8% of these candidates indicate experiencing anxiety levels that range from moderately high to extremely high, with a notable 7% higher occurrence among female candidates compared to their male counterparts. The study further substantiates the hypothesis that a rise in NEET attempts is associated with elevated anxiety levels. The results underscore an immediate necessity for tailored interventions, including teacher training, optimization of study materials, implementation of retrieval practices, personalization of study plans, cultivation of effective study habits, enhancement of time management skills, regular mock examinations, and provision of psychological support via peer groups and counseling services. By implementing these strategies, educational institutions, coaching centers, and stakeholders can cultivate a more accommodating educational atmosphere that recognizes and tackles the psychological challenges associated with test anxiety. This method enhances academic achievement while also fostering a supportive student community. In conclusion, stakeholders ought to create a more encouraging



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environment for NEET candidates from the Kargil district, thereby reducing the heightened test anxiety observed.

9. AUTHOR(S) CONTRIBUTION

The writers affirm that they have no connections to, or engagement with, any group or body that provides financial or non-financial assistance for the topics or resources covered in this manuscript.

10.CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

11.PLAGIARISM POLICY

All authors declare that any kind of violation of plagiarism, copyright and ethical matters will take care by all authors. Journal and editors are not liable for aforesaid matters.

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