

Anxiety Symptoms in University Professors during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Letter

The pandemic scenario for the new COVID-19 (corona virus disease), reached alarming proportions, thus many government officials declared a state of emergency to effectively fight the disease through strategies including, social distance through decrees for stay at home, travel restrictions and closing non-essential services [1-3]. In addition, in order to prevent the spread of this pathology, competent bodies have opted for a halt in its operation, among them institutions of basic to higher education, these procedures occurred in 150 countries from March 25, 2020, causing an impact for more than 80% of the world's student population [4,5].

About health, it is already known that prolonged home isolation, during the outbreak of a disease can promote damage to the physical and mental health of individuals [6]. In this sense, during a COVID-19 pandemic, anxiety may develop in healthy individuals or those with a previous psychiatric disorder [4].

Some studies have already shown changes in the mental or physical state of health professional [7], as well as students in several higher education courses were studied during the COVID-19 pandemic period [2], however, the real impact of this chaotic situation on components related to the mental health of university professors is not known. In this sense, the objective of this cross-sectional study was to quantify the symptoms of anxiety during the period of social detachment, in addition to making a comparison between teachers in relation to sex and in different undergraduate courses in the Centro Universitario Escritor Osman da Costa Lins-UNIFACOL, em Vitória de Santo Antão- PE, Brazil. The research was approved by the Human Studies Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Pernambuco with protocol number 4,066,034.

All teachers (n=200) who remained in remote classes, were invited to participate in the online survey by digital media. Those who accepted (n=115) answer an electronic questionnaire (Google forms®), between June 4th and 15th, 2020, composed of sociodemographic issues and the trait-state anxiety inventory (TSAI) that assesses subjective aspects related to anxiety [1]. Among volunteers, 57.4% are male, with respect to age 37.4% are between 35 and 45 years old, 61.7% are married, 42.6% have two children or more, 40% exercise teaching for more than ten years,

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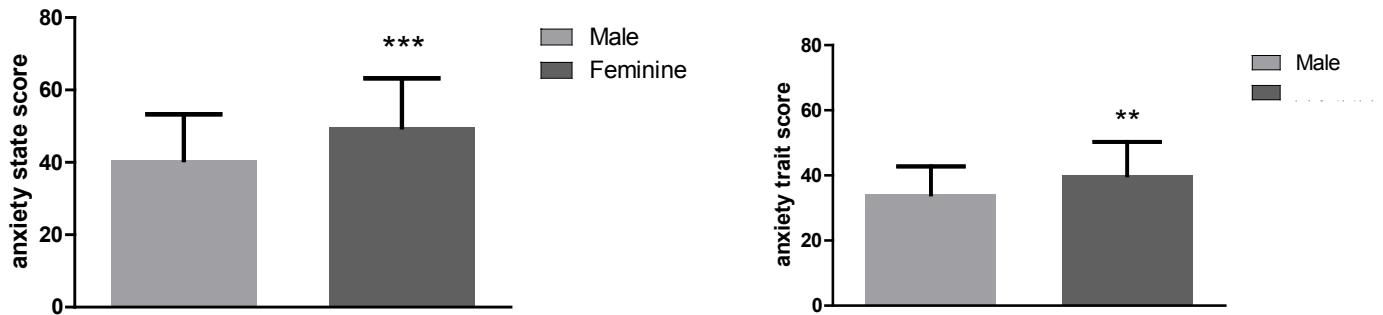


Figure 1 Mean scores of State and Trait of anxiety by sex. Mann Whitney test $p < 0.05$; *** 0.0002; ** 0.0014; $n = 115$ (male=66 and female=49).

Table 1 Sociodemographic characteristics of university professors ($n = 115$).

Gender	Male	66	57,4
	Female	49	42,6
Age	25 to 35 years	34	29,6
	35 to 45 years	43	37,4
	45 to 55 years	24	20,9
	Above 55 years	14	12,2
Marital status	Single	31	27
	Married or living with a partner	71	61,7
	Separated or divorced	12	10,4
	Widower	1	0,9
Race	Black	8	7
	White	61	53
	Brown	45	39,1
	Mixed race	1	0,9
Occupation area	Health	57	49,6
	Exact sciences	14	12,2
	Human	51	44,3
Number of children	None	27	33,9
	One	39	23,5
	Two or more	49	42,6
How long have you been a professor	1-2 years	20	17,4
	3-5 years	22	19,1
	6-10 years	27	23,5
	Over 10 years	46	40
Daily working hours	3-6 hours	37	32,2
	6-8 hours	26	22,6
	8-10 hours	24	20,9
	More than 10 hours	28	24,3

24.3% report working more than ten hours a day, and 49.6% teach in health courses (**Table 1**).

With regard to the trait, which shows a more stable and frequent aspect of anxiety in the individual's life, 12% of the volunteers manifested a high degree, however with regard to the state, which represents the level of anxiety presented at the moment evaluated, 46% of the total number of teachers had a high degree of anxiety symptoms. Higher levels of anxiety symptoms were found in female teachers, both in the state and in the trait (**Figure 1**).

A study carried out during the outbreak of COVID-19 in an adult population, found moderate to severe anxiety symptoms in about a third of individuals and the female sex was significantly associated with a greater psychological impact and higher levels of anxiety [6]. Despite studying a different population, our result was similar. Some factors such as the speed at which the virus spreads, the uncertainties about it, the duration of the pandemic and its consequences can be risk factors for the mental health of the population [8]. These findings point to the need for actions on the part of institutions to maintain the mental health of their employees, which can promote an improvement in the provision of services and the well-being of professionals, especially in a time of pandemic.

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