

# AN INVESTIGATION OF ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION AMONG OFFICER CADETS DURING THE ARMY BASIC TRAINING IN SRI LANKA ARMY

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Depression and Anxiety are mental health conditions that have been extensively studied in the world and Sri Lanka across varying populations. Army officer cadets are a group that is vulnerable to developing such conditions due to the military training process and adjustment issues they face. However, the mental health conditions of the Army officer cadets and mental health disparities between officer cadets have seldom been studied. The present study investigated the prevalence rates of depression and anxiety among officer cadets in Sri Lanka Army. In addition, the present study aimed to examine the relationship between anxiety and depression among officer cadets during basic army training and examine whether levels of anxiety and depression vary depending on the level of education and duration of the training. The current study employed the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale- 21 (DASS-21) and General Health Questionnaire-30 (GHQ-30) to assess the prevalence rates of Depression and Anxiety among 250 Army officer cadets. The results indicated that army officer cadets had a significant prevalence rate of anxiety (42%) and a low prevalence rate of depression (22%) Army officer cadets were said to experience mild to extremely severe levels of anxiety and mild to moderate levels of depression. A positive linear relationship was also observed between levels of depression and levels of anxiety among officers. Moreover, there is no significant relationship between anxiety, depression, and duration of the training, however, there is a significant relationship between levels of depression and education. The results and implications of this study are discussed in light of further research.

Keywords: Anxiety, Army officer cadets, Depression, mental well-being

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## INTRODUCTION

Military training marks a critical juncture in an individual's life, encompassing transformative experiences and significant life outcomes (Martin et al., 2009). However, the military environment introduces a multitude of occupational stressors that can profoundly affect the mental well-being of individuals, potentially leading to the development of anxiety and depression (Kumar et al., 2013). Extensive research has highlighted a higher prevalence of anxiety and depression among military personnel when compared to the general population (Warner et al., 2007; Warner et al., 2007). These mental health challenges are influenced by factors such as separation from loved ones, exposure to the hardships of war, and the demanding nature of military life (Gaziano et al., 2016).

Despite the growing body of literature on the mental health of military personnel, there remains a dearth of research specifically examining officer cadets during basic army training in Sri Lanka. Limited attention has been given to exploring the prevalence and impact of anxiety and depression within this population. Given that military training represents a unique and challenging period in an individual's life, understanding the mental health experiences of officer cadets during this crucial phase is of utmost importance.

By focusing on officer cadets undergoing basic army training, this study aims to address this research gap and contribute to the understanding of anxiety and depression in military settings. Officer cadets encounter a distinct set of stressors during their training, which necessitates a dedicated examination of their mental health status. Gaining insights into the prevalence and impact of anxiety and depression among officer cadets can inform the development of tailored interventions and support systems to foster their psychological well-being.

Moreover, studying the mental health of officer cadets during basic army training holds significant practical implications. Identifying the prevalence and correlates of anxiety and depression in this population can help military institutions create proactive strategies to support their mental health needs. By implementing effective interventions and support mechanisms, the Sri Lanka Army can enhance the resilience and overall well-being of officer cadets throughout their training and subsequent service.

The aim of this study is to examine the prevalence of anxiety and depression among officer cadets during basic army training in the Sri Lanka Army. By understanding the mental health challenges faced by officer cadets, this research can contribute to enhancing support systems and interventions to promote their psychological well-being.

## Main Objective

To determine the prevalence of anxiety and depression among officer cadets during the basic army training in Sri Lanka Army.

## Specific Objectives

- To examine the level of anxiety among officer cadets during basic army training.
- To examine the level of depression among officer cadets during basic army training.

- To examine whether there is a relationship between anxiety and depression among officer cadets during basic army training.
- To examine whether levels of anxiety and depression vary depend on level of education and duration of the training.

By addressing these objectives, this study will provide insights into the mental health status of officer cadets and contribute to the existing knowledge on anxiety and depression among military personnel. This research is particularly relevant as it focuses on a population undergoing training, where mental health support and interventions can have a significant impact on their overall well-being and successful completion of basic army training.

Understanding the prevalence and factors associated with anxiety and depression among officer cadets during basic Army training can inform the development of targeted interventions, support systems, and policies to address their mental health needs effectively. Furthermore, this study will help bridge the existing knowledge gap in Sri Lanka regarding mental health problems among military cadets and contribute to the overall understanding of mental health in military settings.

By shedding light on the prevalence of anxiety and depression among officer cadets during basic Army training, this research aims to pave the way for improved mental health support and intervention strategies, ultimately enhancing the well-being and resilience of officer cadets in the Sri Lanka Army.

## METHODOLOGY

The study employed a cross-sectional study design to investigate the prevalence of anxiety and depression among officer cadets during basic Army training in the Sri Lanka Army. This design allowed for data collection at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of the cadets' mental health status during their training period.

The study population consisted of officer cadets at the Sri Lanka Military Academy in Diyathalawa. The total number of officer cadets in the academy was 479. A sample size of 236 officer cadets was determined using random sampling, following the guidelines outlined in the Morgan table (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). This sample size ensured adequate representation of the study population.

Sinhala version of the DASS 21, depression and anxiety questions of GHQ 30 and demographic questionnaire were employed to gather data to achieve the objectives of the present study. All instruments were self-administered.

**Anxiety:** Anxiety was measured using the Anxiety Subscale in the Sinhala version of the Depression, Anxiety and Stress scale-21 (DASS-21) (Aththidiye, 2012). The items such as “experienced breathing difficulty” were rated using a 4- point Likert- type scale (0 = *Never* to 3 = *Almost always*). (Aththidiye, 2012). Besides, the Sinhala version of the Anxiety Subscale in the General Health Questionnaire-30 was used to assess anxiety (GHQ-30) (Abeyseena, 2012). The items such as “No warmth and affection” and intimacy were rated using a 4- point Likert- type scale (1= *Never* to 4 = *Almost always*).

**Depression:** Depression was measured using the Sinhala version of the Depression Subscale in the Depression, Anxiety and Stress scale-21(Aththidiye, 2012). The items such as “couldn't experience positive feeling” and emotion were rated using a 4- point Likert scale (0= *Never* to 3= *Almost always*). Moreover, the Sinhala version of the depression items in the General Health Questionnaire -30 (Abeyseena, 2012) was used to assess depression. The items such as “Lost sleep” were rated using a 4- point Likert- type scale (1 = *Never* to 4 = *Almost always*). In the present study, internal consistency for this scale was  $\alpha = .773$ .

**Demographic Information:** A demographic questionnaire was used to collect data on participants' gender, duration of the training, worrying about the future, family history of mental illness, family history of alcohol abuse, and history of verbal abuse.

Prior to data collection, informed written consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring their voluntary participation and maintaining confidentiality.

Statistical analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 28 software. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were calculated to summarize the levels of anxiety and depression among the officer cadets. Correlation analysis, specifically Spearman's rho, was used to examine the relationships between anxiety and depression levels, as well as their associations with other variables. The significance level was set at  $p < 0.05$ .

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Prevalence of Anxiety and Depression among Officer Cadets

The prevalence of anxiety and depression among officer cadets during basic Army training in the Sri Lanka Army was assessed using two established measures: the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21) and the General Health Questionnaire-30 (GHQ-30).

In this study, the selected items from the DASS-21 and GHQ-30 were used to assess anxiety and depression levels among officer cadets during their basic Army training. The collected data allowed for an in-depth analysis of the prevalence and severity of anxiety and depression symptoms among the participants. Accordingly, the majority of participants (57%) were in the normal range. Out of 43% those who had anxiety, 8% had mild level of anxiety and 20% had moderate level of anxiety. Further, 7% had severe anxiety level while another 7% had extremely severe anxiety level. Officer Cadets, on the other hand, had a significantly higher prevalence of showing moderate levels of anxiety symptoms ( $N = 48$ , 20%). All of the categories of mild, moderate, severe, and extremely severe anxiety were taken into consideration while looking at symptoms of anxiety. As a result, it was discovered that ( $N = 102$ ) officer cadets suffer from anxiety.

**Table 1**

*Levels of anxiety of officer cadets according to DASS-21*

Level of Anxiety	Percentage (%)
Normal	57%
Mild	8%
Moderate	20%
Severe	7%
Extreme Severe	7%

Source: survey Data, 2022

### The Level of Depression among Office Cadets

The total number of Officer Cadets found depression has been reported as 22%. On the other hand, cadet officers had a significantly higher risk of exhibiting modest degrees of depressive symptoms ( $N = 18$ ). In addition, 10 (4%) of the participants in the officer cadet programme display moderate levels of depression. According to the results shown above, there is not a

single cadet officer who is suffering from severe or extremely severe levels of depression. All of the symptoms that fell into the mild, moderate, severe, and extremely severe categories were thought to be indicative of depression. As a result, 53 of the officer cadets were determined to be suffering from depression.

**Table 2**

*Levels of depression of cadet officers according to DASS-21*

Level of Depression	Percentage (%)
Normal	77%
Mild	18%
Moderate	4%

Source: survey Data, 2022

**Internal Consistency of Anxiety and Depression Subscales:**

The anxiety subscale demonstrated good internal consistency, as measured by Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.844. This indicates that the anxiety subscale items reliably measure anxiety symptoms among officer cadets. Similarly, the depression subscale showed high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.926. This suggests that the depression subscale items provide a reliable assessment of depressive symptoms among officer cadets during their basic Army training.

**Relationship between Anxiety and Depression:**

A positive relationship was observed between anxiety and depression among officer cadets during basic Army training. Higher levels of anxiety were associated with higher levels of depression. This finding emphasizes the interconnected nature of anxiety and depression symptoms and highlights the need for comprehensive interventions targeting both conditions.

**Table 1 - Level of Anxiety/Depression of officer cadets vary on the duration of the training (Correlation)**

Variable	Training Period	Anxiety Level	Depression Level
Training Period	1.000	-0.018	-0.061
Anxiety Level	-0.018	1.000	-
Depression Level	-0.061	-	1.000

Source: survey Data, 2022

**Association with Education Level and Training Duration:**

No significant associations were found between anxiety and depression levels and factors such as education level and training duration. This suggests that the prevalence of anxiety and depression symptoms among officer cadets does not vary significantly based on these factors during basic army training.

**Table 2 - Level of Anxiety/Depression of officer cadets vary on the level of education (Correlation)**

Variable	Education Level	Anxiety Level	Depression Level
Education Level	1.000	-0.033	-0.129*
Anxiety Level	-0.033	1.000	-
Depression Level	-0.129*	-	1.000

**Discussion:**

The results of this study indicate that officer cadets in the Sri Lanka Army experience moderate levels of anxiety and depression during their basic training. These findings align with previous research highlighting the higher prevalence of anxiety and depression among military personnel compared to the general population (Asad Zandi et al., 2011; Bryan & Heron, 2015; Hartley et al., 2013; Woo et al., 2021).

The moderate levels of anxiety and depression among officer cadets emphasize the importance of addressing their mental health needs during this critical period. Effective interventions and support systems can promote the overall well-being and successful completion of basic Army training for officer cadets.

The positive relationship between anxiety and depression suggests that a comprehensive approach is necessary to target both conditions simultaneously. Mental health support programs and interventions tailored to the specific needs of officer cadets can contribute to their psychological well-being and resilience.

Although no significant associations were found between anxiety and depression levels and education level or training duration, it is important to consider other factors that may contribute to mental health outcomes among officer cadets. Future research could explore additional factors such as social support, coping strategies, and the impact of specific training experiences on anxiety and depression symptoms.

**CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS**

In conclusion, this study highlights the prevalence of anxiety and depression among officer cadets during basic army training in the Sri Lanka Army. Officer cadets experience moderate levels of anxiety and depression, emphasizing the need for targeted mental health support during this critical period. The positive relationship between anxiety and depression underscores the importance of comprehensive interventions addressing both conditions simultaneously.

To support officer cadets' mental well-being, it is recommended to implement tailored mental health support programs providing accessible resources, counseling services, and coping mechanism training. Early detection and intervention through screening processes can identify at-risk cadets and provide timely support. Integrating resilience-building and stress management training into basic Army training can equip cadets with effective coping strategies.

Collaboration and open communication between military authorities, mental health professionals, and officer cadets are essential to create a supportive environment that reduces stigma and encourages help-seeking. Further research is needed to explore additional factors

influencing anxiety and depression among officer cadets.

By implementing these recommendations, the Sri Lanka Army can prioritize the mental health of officer cadets, ensuring their successful training completion and long-term well-being in their military careers.

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