



The Influence of Anxiety on Cognitive Failures and Dissociative Experiences among Adults

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Abstract: The present study examined the influence of anxiety on cognitive failures and dissociative experiences among adults aged 18–45 years. The research aimed to explore whether anxiety is associated with everyday cognitive inefficiencies and disruptions in psychological integration, and whether these variables differ across age groups. A quantitative cross-sectional correlational design was employed. The sample consisted of 102 adults recruited through convenience sampling. Participants completed the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale (GAD-7), Cognitive Failures Questionnaire 2.0 (CFQ 2.0), and Dissociative Experiences Scale–II (DES-II). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, simple linear regression, and one-way ANOVA. Results indicated a statistically significant positive correlation between anxiety and cognitive failures, $r(100) = .42$, $p < .001$, and between anxiety and dissociative experiences, $r(100) = .25$, $p = .010$. Cognitive failures and dissociative experiences were also significantly positively correlated, $r(100) = .50$, $p < .001$. Regression analyses revealed that anxiety significantly predicted cognitive failures, accounting for 17.6% of the variance, and significantly predicted dissociative experiences, accounting for 6.5% of the variance. However, one-way ANOVA analyses indicated that age-group differences (18–25, 26–35, and 36–45 years) were not statistically significant for anxiety, cognitive failures, or dissociative experiences, suggesting that these relationships were relatively consistent across early and mid-adulthood. The findings highlight the interconnected nature of emotional distress and everyday cognitive functioning. Anxiety appears to contribute not only to subjective cognitive lapses but also to dissociative tendencies within a general adult population. These results underscore the importance of addressing anxiety symptoms to promote cognitive efficiency and psychological integration in adulthood.

Keywords: *Anxiety, Cognitive Failures, Dissociative Experiences, Adults*

1. Introduction

The relationship between emotional states and cognitive functioning has long occupied a central position within psychological science. Early perspectives treated emotion and cognition as distinct systems, with emotion viewed as impulsive and cognition as rational (Zajonc, 1980).

Contemporary frameworks emphasize that emotion and cognition are interwoven and operate in continuous interaction (Lazarus, 1991; Scherer, 2005). Emotional responses arise through cognitive appraisals, while cognition unfolds within emotional contexts, reflecting a reciprocal relationship.

Theoretical models highlight cognition as central to emotion. Lazarus's (1991) appraisal theory and Scherer's (2005) component process model demonstrate that emotion emerges through evaluation and action readiness, influencing attention, memory, and behavior. Anxiety is a multidimensional construct involving worry, vigilance, physiological arousal, and avoidance. Although defined clinically (APA, 2013), it also exists as a common everyday experience and is characterized by future-oriented uncertainty.

Theoretical models suggest anxiety arises through vulnerability and interpretation (Barlow, 2002; Ingram & Luxton, 2005). While moderate anxiety may enhance alertness (Yerkes & Dodson, 1908), excessive anxiety reduces cognitive efficiency. Processing Efficiency Theory proposes that worry consumes working memory resources (Eysenck & Calvo, 1992), while Attentional Control Theory suggests impaired executive control and increased sensitivity to threat (Eysenck et al., 2007).

Empirical evidence links anxiety to impairments in working memory and inhibition (Derakshan & Eysenck, 2009), indicating its influence on cognitive functioning.

Cognitive failures represent everyday inefficiencies such as attentional lapses and forgetfulness (Broadbent et al., 1982) and are more strongly associated with affective states than objective deficits (Carrigan & Barkus, 2016). Anxiety may contribute to these failures by occupying working memory and increasing threat monitoring (Eysenck et al., 2007), while metacognitive processes increase awareness of lapses (Wells, 2009).

Dissociation involves disruptions in consciousness, memory, and identity (Spiegel & Cardena, 1991; Kihlstrom, 2005) and exists dimensionally (APA, 2013). Heightened emotional arousal may disrupt integrative processes, leading to fragmentation of awareness (Holmes et al., 2005; Van der Hart et al., 2006).

Thus, anxiety may influence cognitive failures directly through reduced executive resources and indirectly through dissociative processes. These constructs represent interconnected aspects of cognitive–affective functioning, which the present study examines within everyday adult experience.

2. Review of Literature

Goodhew and Edwards (2024) investigated the association between trait anxiety and everyday cognitive failures in a large adult sample and found that higher anxiety significantly predicted increased cognitive failures, even after controlling for attentional control. This highlights cognitive failures as real-world manifestations of anxiety-related attentional inefficiencies.

Goodhew and Edwards (2025) conducted a meta-analysis examining subjective cognitive failures and executive functioning. Their findings revealed small but reliable associations with inhibition, working memory, and sustained attention, suggesting that cognitive failures reflect both affective vulnerability and measurable executive inefficiencies.

Angelidis et al. (2019) experimentally examined the impact of performance anxiety on working memory. Participants exposed to stress conditions demonstrated elevated anxiety and slower working memory performance, particularly among individuals high in trait anxiety.

Fisher et al. (2020) explored cognitive failures among bereaved adults and found that anxiety independently predicted higher cognitive failure scores even after controlling for depression. This suggests that anxiety contributes uniquely to subjective cognitive disruption.

Arıcan and Kafadar (2022) examined COVID-19-related anxiety and found that it significantly predicted failures in attention, memory, perception, and motor functioning, demonstrating the impact of situational anxiety on everyday cognitive performance.

Carrigan and Barkus (2016) conducted a systematic review and found consistent positive associations between cognitive failures and anxiety, despite inconsistent links with objective neuropsychological performance. This supports the view that cognitive failures reflect affective influences rather than structural deficits.

Sultana et al. (2026) examined psychological distress among university students and found that anxiety significantly predicted memory lapses, attentional inefficiencies, and reduced task focus, highlighting its impact on cognitive functioning in academic settings.

Hill et al. (2025) examined anxiety severity and dissociation and found that higher anxiety levels were associated with increased depersonalization and derealization, indicating anxiety as a key determinant of dissociative vulnerability.

Dunalska et al. (2026) investigated dissociative symptoms and found significant associations between anxiety and both psychoform and somatoform dissociation. Their findings also suggested that dissociation may mediate broader distress pathways.

Buchnik-Daniely et al. (2021) conducted a longitudinal study and found that increases in anxiety predicted increases in dissociative experiences over time, supporting a distress-based model of dissociation.

Mhanna et al. (2022) studied non-clinical populations and found that anxiety and stress significantly predicted dissociative symptoms, suggesting that dissociation can emerge under sustained emotional strain outside clinical contexts.

Sevindik et al. (2022) found that anxiety severity significantly predicted dissociation even after controlling for personality traits, indicating that dissociation is strongly influenced by anxiety intensity.

Kiamarsi et al. (2020) reported higher levels of cognitive failures, dissociation, and emotional dysregulation in trauma-affected individuals, suggesting shared cognitive–affective mechanisms linking these constructs.

2.1 Research Gap

A key limitation in existing literature is the tendency to examine anxiety in relation to either cognitive failures or dissociative experiences separately, rather than within an integrated framework. As a result, the interrelationship between cognitive failures and dissociation in the context of anxiety remains underexplored. It is unclear whether dissociation may function as a pathway through which anxiety contributes to everyday cognitive inefficiencies.

Another limitation is the reliance on clinical samples. While research on disorders such as Generalized Anxiety Disorder and panic disorder provides valuable insights, these findings may not generalize to non-clinical adult populations. Every day, subclinical anxiety experienced in academic, occupational, and interpersonal contexts may also contribute to cognitive and experiential disruptions but has received comparatively less integrated attention.

There is also limited research bridging attentional control models with dissociation frameworks to explain how anxiety may simultaneously impair cognitive efficiency and disrupt psychological integration.

Additionally, although overlap between dissociation and cognitive failures has been suggested (Kiamarsi et al.), it has rarely been examined within a unified predictive model. It

remains unclear whether dissociation is merely a co-occurring correlate of anxiety or contributes to cognitive lapses as part of a broader emotional–cognitive vulnerability profile.

Finally, much of the literature is based on Western or crisis-specific contexts, potentially limiting generalizability. Broader adult samples across diverse sociocultural settings may provide further insight into how anxiety manifests in everyday cognitive and experiential domains.

2.2 Rationale for the Present Study

The present study aims to develop a more integrated understanding of how anxiety relates to cognitive failures and dissociative experiences in everyday adult functioning. While anxiety has been widely studied, its simultaneous influence on these constructs has received limited unified attention.

Anxiety exists along a continuum and is commonly experienced in varying intensities across adulthood. Even moderate levels may influence attention, working memory, and awareness. Cognitive failures and dissociative experiences represent everyday manifestations of cognitive–affective strain, reflecting subtle disruptions in concentration, memory, and experiential continuity.

To address these gaps, the present study:

- Examines anxiety, cognitive failures, and dissociation simultaneously
- Focuses on adults aged 18–45 years
- Tests anxiety as a predictor within a unified analytical model

2.3 Objectives and Hypotheses

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- To assess the levels of anxiety, cognitive failures, and dissociative experiences among adults.
- To examine the relationship between anxiety and cognitive failures among adults.
- To examine the relationship between anxiety and dissociative experiences among adults.
- To investigate whether anxiety significantly predicts cognitive failure among adults.
- To investigate whether anxiety significantly predicts dissociative experiences among adults.
- To examine whether cognitive failures and dissociative experiences differ across the age groups.

2.4 Hypotheses

Based on existing theoretical frameworks and prior empirical findings, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Anxiety will be positively correlated with cognitive failures in adults.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Anxiety will be positively correlated with dissociative experiences in adults.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Anxiety will significantly predict cognitive failures in adults.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Anxiety will significantly predict dissociative experiences in adults.

Hypotheses 5 (H5): There will be significant differences in anxiety, cognitive failures, and dissociative experiences across the three age groups.

3. Methodology

3.1 Study Design

The study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design to examine relationships among anxiety, cognitive failures, and dissociative experiences. Regression analysis was used to assess predictive relationships.

3.2 Sample

The sample consisted of 102 adults aged 18–45 years recruited through convenience sampling. This size was adequate for correlation and regression analyses. Inclusion criteria included adults aged 18–45 years, voluntary participation, informed consent, and ability to comprehend the questionnaire.

3.3 Scales

Three instruments were used:

- **GAD-7 (Spitzer et al., 2006)** to assess anxiety
- **CFQ 2.0** to assess cognitive failures
- **DES-II** to assess dissociative experiences

All scales demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha \approx .87-.93$).

3.4 Statistical Analysis

Data were collected via an online survey, and responses were analyzed using SPSS. Analyses included descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, regression, and one-way ANOVA. Significance was set at $p < .05$.

4. Result & Interpretation

Descriptive Statistics

To address the first objective, which was to assess the levels of anxiety, cognitive failures, and dissociative experiences among adults, descriptive statistics were calculated

Table 1: *Anxiety Across Age Groups*

Age Group	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
18–25	51	8.37	4.90	–	–
26–35	38	7.13	4.83	–	–
36–45	13	5.77	3.17	–	–
Total	102	7.58	4.74	0	21

Table 2: *Cognitive Failures Across Age Groups*

Age Group	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
18–25	51	15.86	10.72	–	–
26–35	38	15.31	7.66	–	–
36–45	13	11.38	6.20	–	–
Total	102	15.09	9.22	0	46

Table 3: *Dissociative Experiences Across Age Groups*

Age Group	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
18–25	51	3.00	2.09	–	–
26–35	38	3.20	2.32	–	–
36–45	13	1.75	1.33	–	–
Total	102	2.91	2.14	–	–

Table 4. *Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables Overall and by Age Group (N = 102)*

Variable	Range (Min–Max)	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Anxiety	0 – 21	7.58	4.74
Cognitive Failures	0 – 46	15.09	9.22
Dissociative Experiences	0 – 8.07	2.91	2.14

Statistical Analysis

To examine the second objective, which was to investigate the relationship between anxiety and cognitive failures among adults and the third objective of the study was to examine the relationship between anxiety and dissociative experiences among adults, a Pearson correlation analyses were conducted to examine the linear relationships among anxiety, cognitive failures, and dissociative experiences.

Table 5. *Pearson Correlations Among Anxiety, Cognitive Failures, and Dissociative Experiences (N = 102)*

Variable	1	2	3
1. Anxiety (GAD_TOTAL)	1	.420**	.254**
2. Cognitive Failures (CFQ_TOTAL)	.420**	1	.502**
3. Dissociative Experiences (DES_MEAN)	.254**	.502**	1

The analysis revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between anxiety and cognitive failures, $r(100) = .420$, $p < .001$. Therefore, Hypothesis 1, which stated that anxiety would be positively correlated with cognitive failures among adults, was accepted.

Pearson correlation analysis indicated a statistically significant positive correlation between anxiety and dissociative experiences, $r(100) = .254$, $p = .010$. Accordingly, Hypothesis 2, which proposed a positive relationship between anxiety and dissociative experiences among adults, was accepted.

The fourth objective, which was to examine whether anxiety significantly predicts cognitive failures among adults, a simple linear regression analysis was performed.

Table 6. *Linear Regression Predicting Cognitive Failures from Anxiety (N = 102)*

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Constant	8.897	1.577	—	5.641	.000
Anxiety	0.817	0.177	.420	4.623	.000

The simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine whether anxiety significantly predicted cognitive failures. The regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 100) = 21.37$, $p < .001$, with an R^2 value of .176. Anxiety accounted for 17.6% of the variance in cognitive failure scores.

Anxiety was found to be a significant predictor of cognitive failures, $\beta = .420$, $t(100) = 4.623$, $p < .001$. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was accepted.

The fifth objective, which was to examine whether anxiety significantly predicts dissociative experiences among adults, a second simple linear regression analysis was conducted.

Table 7. *Linear Regression Predicting Dissociative Experiences from Anxiety (N = 102)*

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Constant	2.046	.389	—	5.257	.000
Anxiety	.115	.044	.254	2.627	.010

A second simple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine whether anxiety significantly predicted dissociative experiences. The regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 100) = 6.90$, $p = .010$, with an R^2 value of .065. Anxiety accounted for 6.5% of the variance in dissociative experience scores.

Table 8. *One-Way ANOVA Results for Age Group Differences*

Variable	SS (Between)	df (Between)	SS (Within)	df (Within)	F	p	η^2
Anxiety (GAD-7)	82.301	2	2184.571	99	1.865	.160	.036
Cognitive Failures (CFQ 2.0)	210.879	2	8381.327	99	1.245	.292	.025
Dissociative Experiences (DES-II)	21.104	2	439.688	99	2.376	.098	.046

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine whether anxiety, cognitive failures, and dissociative experiences differed across the three age groups (18–25 years, 26–35 years, and 36–45 years). The analysis indicated that age group did not have a statistically significant effect on anxiety scores, $F(2, 99) = 1.87$, $p = .160$, $\eta^2 = .036$. Similarly, no significant age-group differences were found for cognitive failures, $F(2, 99) = 1.25$, $p = .292$, $\eta^2 = .025$. Differences in dissociative experiences across age groups were also not statistically significant, $F(2, 99) = 2.38$, $p = .098$, $\eta^2 = .046$.

5. Discussion

The present study examined the influence of anxiety on cognitive failures and dissociative experiences in adults. Drawing on cognitive–affective frameworks, it explored whether anxiety is associated with everyday cognitive inefficiencies and disruptions in psychological integration, and whether it predicts these outcomes across age groups. Overall,

four of the five hypotheses were supported. Anxiety was positively correlated with and significantly predicted both cognitive failures and dissociative experiences, while age-group differences were not statistically significant. These findings highlight how emotional states shape both cognitive performance and subjective experience in everyday life.

The results revealed a significant positive correlation between anxiety and cognitive failures, supporting Hypothesis 1. Individuals with higher anxiety reported more frequent lapses in attention, memory, and task execution.

These inefficiencies reflect disruptions in attentional allocation rather than structural impairment. Attentional Control Theory (Eysenck et al., 2007) explains that anxiety increases vigilance toward threat and intrusive thoughts, consuming working memory resources and reducing capacity for task-relevant processing.

These findings align with Goodhew and Edwards (2024), who found that trait anxiety predicts cognitive failures, and Reumers et al. (2023), who reported anxiety as a predictor of subjective cognitive complaints. The present study extends this relationship to a general adult population.

Regression analysis showed that anxiety significantly predicted cognitive failures, accounting for 17.6% of the variance (supporting H3). Although other factors contribute, anxiety emerged as a meaningful predictor. This aligns with Processing Efficiency Theory (Eysenck & Calvo, 1992), which suggests that anxiety reduces cognitive efficiency even when performance is maintained. Over time, increased mental effort may lead to fatigue, reduced concentration, and greater susceptibility to everyday errors.

A significant positive relationship between anxiety and dissociation was found, supporting Hypothesis 2. Individuals with higher anxiety reported greater dissociative experiences such as detachment and altered awareness.

This suggests that dissociation may occur dimensionally in response to emotional arousal. Supporting this, Hill et al. (2025) found increased dissociation with higher anxiety severity, while Sevindik et al. (2022) and Dunalska et al. (2026) reported similar associations.

Regression results showed that anxiety significantly predicted dissociative experiences, accounting for 6.5% of the variance (supporting H4). Although smaller than cognitive failures, anxiety remained a significant predictor.

Conceptually, dissociation reflects disrupted integration under emotional overload. Cognitive models suggest that anxiety narrows attention and weakens contextual integration (Holmes et al., 2005), leading to detachment and fragmentation of awareness.

A significant positive correlation was also found between cognitive failures and dissociation, suggesting shared mechanisms.

Kiamarsi et al. reported co-occurrence of dissociation and cognitive failures under emotional dysregulation, while Dunalska et al. (2026) observed interactions between anxiety and dissociation.

Dissociative detachment may impair attentional continuity and memory encoding, increasing cognitive lapses. Conversely, repeated cognitive failures may contribute to reduced coherence and self-doubt. Although mediation was not tested, dissociation may represent a pathway linking anxiety and cognitive inefficiency.

No significant age-group differences were found, leading to rejection of Hypothesis 5. Although minor variations were observed, these were not statistically significant.

This suggests that relationships among anxiety, cognitive failures, and dissociation are stable across early and mid-adulthood. Anxiety-related cognitive disruptions therefore appear to be a general adult phenomenon rather than age-specific.

The findings support a unified emotional–cognitive framework. Anxiety was associated with and predicted both cognitive failures and dissociation, indicating its influence on attention, memory, and experiential integration.

Cognitive failures and dissociation should be viewed as interconnected outcomes of emotional–cognitive strain. Anxiety increases arousal and threat monitoring, cognitive failures reflect reduced executive efficiency, and dissociation reflects disrupted integration. These processes share underlying mechanisms of resource depletion and emotional overload.

The study relied on self-report measures, which may introduce response biases and shared method variance. Subjective cognitive failures may not always correspond to objective performance (Carrigan & Barkus, 2016).

The cross-sectional design limits causal interpretation, as relationships may be bidirectional. Longitudinal research is needed to clarify directionality.

The broad age range may not capture finer developmental differences. Additionally, the study focused only on anxiety, while other factors such as stress and depression (Arıcan & Kafadar, 2022; Fisher et al., 2020) may also influence outcomes.

The study demonstrated that anxiety is positively associated with and predicts both cognitive failures and dissociative experiences in adults. These findings support the interdependence of emotional and cognitive systems, consistent with Attentional Control

Theory (Eysenck et al., 2007) and models of dissociation (Spiegel & Cardena, 1991; Kihlstrom, 2005).

Importantly, these effects were observed in a non-clinical population, highlighting the role of everyday anxiety in shaping cognitive efficiency and subjective experience.

From an applied perspective, reducing anxiety may improve attentional stability, decrease cognitive lapses, and enhance psychological integration. Cognitive complaints should therefore be considered in the context of emotional functioning.

By examining anxiety, cognitive failures, and dissociation together, the study contributes to a more integrated understanding of emotional–cognitive processes in adulthood and underscores the impact of everyday emotional experiences on cognitive functioning.

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