



## **A Study on Anxiety and using Sense of Humor as Coping Mechanism among College Going Students**

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**Abstract:** The study explores the correlation between humor and anxiety, focusing on how humor serves as a coping mechanism to alleviate anxiety in individuals. Anxiety, a natural response to stress, can become debilitating when experienced chronically, while humor, a multidimensional construct, fosters emotional relief and resilience. Using the Hamilton Anxiety Scale and the Multidimensional Sense of Humor Scale, data were collected from a sample of 30 college students aged 17–25 years in Mohali. Participants completed standardized psychological assessments through Google Forms. The findings aim to highlight the role of humor in reducing anxiety and its potential as an effective strategy for managing stressful situations. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the interplay between emotional regulation and coping mechanisms, offering insights for psychological well-being.

**Keywords:** *Anxiety, Humor, College Going Students*

## 1. Introduction

Anxiety is like that over-the-top friend who always thinks the sky is falling—even when it is just a cloudy day. It has a knack for sneaking into your life uninvited, crashing all your peaceful moments with an endless stream of "what ifs" and "oh no's." But here is the thing: sometimes the best way to confront it isn't by trying to shove it in a box but by laughing at the ridiculous lengths it will go to. So, something as simple as laughing over a clever joke, a funny meme, or a silly video can work magic in breaking this cycle of anxiety and bringing relief.

It also releases a flood of "feel-good" chemicals called endorphins in the brain, which act as natural mood elevators. These chemicals don't only make you feel happy but also let your body and mind relax and release all that tension. Laughter decreases the production of stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline that create those nervous, on-edge feelings. It is like a reset button for your brain, allowing you to take a short mental vacation from all that overthinking and worrying.

Humor doesn't only update how your body feels — it changes your mindset, too. It helps you to look at your own problems with different eyes, and most often to make them feel lesser or at least less scary. Instant laughter helps you get some distance from the spiral of thoughts and realize that even in hard times, you can always find something a bit funnier. Looking at it, this way can be very empowering, turning what once felt like insurmountable challenges into something more manageable.

Beyond the internal benefits, there is something about humor that brings people together. Sharing laughter with friends and family or even complete strangers makes you feel connected to others, reminding you that at least everyone else feels the same way. Anxiety tends to place a person alone in their world, making them feel as though no one else understands what they are going through. It is those shared moments of laughter that remind you that sometimes—other people are going to be there for you, even when it's hard.

Long-term effects of laughter: Humor helps build up one's resistance in life and gives the body more resilience when coming back from stress and anxiety. It is something one learns and acquires, growing with the more one can learn to see humor in day-to-day experiences.

In short, humor is free, accessible, and highly effective in combating anxiety and bringing a lightness to heavy days. Whether it's a stand-up comedy special, a silly conversation with a friend, or a funny memory you replay in your mind, humor offers a moment of escape and a chance

to breathe easier. So, the next time anxiety starts to creep in, don't underestimate the power of a good laugh. It's more than just entertainment—it's a way to heal, connect, and find joy, even in the midst of life's challenges.

### **1.1 Humor**

According to Martin (2007) described humor as “a multidimensional construct that brought together behavioural habits, ability and a coping strategy.”

Humor is a powerful tool that can bring joy, relieve stress, and help people cope with tough situations. It allows us to see things from a lighter perspective, making challenges something to be managed more easily. Whenever we laugh, our brains are releasing endorphins, those natural chemicals that make us happy and relaxed. Humor is also a thing that connects people with each other, creating a bond and letting go of those feelings of loneliness. It can break the tension in awkward or stressful situations and make everything a little easier to handle. Whether it is through jokes, funny movies, or silly moments with friends, humor is an important part of life that makes us feel better, improves our mood, and even boosts our health.

Dionigi, Duradoni and Vagnoli (2023) conducted research to understand the association between humor and emotional distress and the role of light and dark humor in predicting depression, anxiety and stress. A sample of 686 Italian participants was taken aged between 20 to 76 years. The results showed that humor was used as a protective factor for depression, anxiety and stress. Sarcasm was positively associated with depression, while Wit was a protective factor associated with anxiety.

Aymen, Imam and Rehman (2026) conducted research on Humor as a psychological resource, the relationship between humor styles and mental health among young adults. A total sample of 300 university students was taken aged between 18 to 25 years. The scales used in the research study were: The mental health inventory and Humor style questionnaires. The result showed that good psychological well-being and lower psychological well-being were associated with affiliate and self-enhancing humor styles. Whereas higher distress and poor wellbeing was associated with self-defeating humor. The study showed that aggressive humor was higher in males as compared to females, people with poor financial resources use self-defeating humor more than others. It concluded that self-defeating humor often leads to vulnerability and psychological issues, whereas adaptability and psychological wellness is boosted by positive humor.

Amjad and Dasti (2020) conducted research to understand the relationship between Humor styles, emotional regulation and subjective well-being in young adults. A total sample of 370 university students was taken aged between 18 to 24 years, from which half were women and other were men. The results showed that adaptive humor styles had a significant positive relationship with emotion regulation and subjective well-being. Maladaptive humor styles also had a positive relationship with maladaptive emotion regulation but a negative relationship with subjective well-being. Emotional regulation also played an important role between humor styles and subjective well-being in young adults.

### **1.2 Anxiety**

Kruegar (1999) defined anxiety as, “Anxiety is characterized as a state of being that arises from general and non-specific stimuli that are perceived as being potentially threatening in the future.”

Eype and Fenn (2021) conducted research on humor styles, perceived social support and social anxiety in young adults. A total sample of 203 young adults was taken using questionnaires: Humor style questionnaire, Multidimensional scale of perceived social support and social interaction Anxiety scale. The results showed that both genders used affiliated styles, but females were higher on it. Negative style humor was used less as compared to positive style humor. Males used Aggressive humor style more than females. The study also revealed that there was a positive correlation between positive humor styles and level of perceived social support while there was a negative correlation between social anxiety level and positive humor styles.

Caldwell et al. (2002) conducted research on the Patterns of association between alcohol consumption and symptoms of depression and anxiety in young adults. A total sample of 2404 young adults were taken aged between 20 to 24 by measures: The Goldberg depression and anxiety scales, the Positive and negative affect schedule, and the alcohol use disorders identification test. Non/occasional and hazardous/harmful consumption were associated with reduced levels of positive affect and higher levels of anxiety and depression in men. Higher levels of distress evident was reported for male abstainers that were related to being less extroverted, poor health. Whereas in women, higher levels of depression and negative affect was seen in only hazardous/harmful drinkers. Further the study concluded that using marijuana, tobacco and recent stressful events in both men and women was related with hazardous/harmful consumption.

A study was conducted by Mazalin and Moore (2012) to explore Internet use, identity development and social anxiety among young adults. A total sample of 161 individuals was taken aged between 18 to 25 years. The results showed that males had higher levels of social anxiety and less mature identity statuses, which was associated with frequent internet use. Whereas females, social anxiety and identity status were not significantly associated with time spent online.

Anxiety is a natural response to stress, but it can get overwhelming when it happens too frequently or without any obvious reason. It's like your brain is stuck in overdrive, worrying about the future or things that might not even happen. Some common symptoms are restlessness, racing thoughts, difficulty concentrating, and physical signs such as fast heartbeat or sweating. Anxiety makes even simple tasks feel challenging and exhausting. While it is normal to feel anxious at times—before a big test or event—chronic anxiety can disrupt one's life. Coping mechanisms such as deep breathing, exercise, and the support of friends, family, or a therapist may help one handle anxiety. Proper tools will always lead one to find peace and balance.

### ***1.3 Humor as a Coping Mechanism***

Humor is an effective way to cope with the challenges of life by reducing stress, giving better perspective, and increasing emotional resilience. In difficult situations, the presence of humor provides a means to reinterpret and transform the adversity, making it feel less formidable and more workable. A moment of humor can give an individual a feeling of control and optimism, thus easing the emotional burden.

Laughter triggers the release of endorphins-the body's natural "feel-good" chemicals-that enhance mood and induce relaxation. Simultaneously, it decreases stress hormones, such as cortisol, which in turn calms down the body as well as the mind. The physiological change enhances a person's ability to manage stress and anxiety.

Humor also bolsters social bonding. Laughing with friends, family, or colleagues creates an illusion of oneness, lessening the experience of loneliness. These bonds form a vital lifeline of emotional support, which reminds people that others are going through the same challenges.

Humor also builds resilience, the capacity to bounce back from adversity. Those who use humor to cope often show greater emotional endurance, enabling them to face challenges with a positive attitude. It also provides a safe and indirect way of dealing with uncomfortable emotions or situations, making it easier to process and move on.

Accessible and accommodative, humor is in the self-deprecating joke, through storytelling, or perhaps as part of one's participation in a comedy show, thus it can be specifically made on demand.

Humor, in its simplest form, is more than a source of entertainment; it is an immense tool toward stress relief and emotional well-being. It helps develop resilience, strengthen relationships, and reap reframing the difficulty that even in challenging times, there is room for laughter and lightness.

A study was conducted by Artemyeva (2013) on Humor as a form of coping behavior among Russian students. A total sample of 270 university students was taken. The results concluded that students who actively used humor as a coping mechanism were more likely to employ active and straightforward strategies for coping with stressful events in their life. The efficiency of using humor to cope with stressful situations depended on adequate strategy and personal traits of the students. The results also showed that confident and independent students used humor more actively.

#### **1.4 Impact of Anxiety on the Individual**

Anxiety can profoundly affect a person, affecting the physical, emotional, cognitive, and social well-being of a person. Though occasional anxiety is a normal response to stress, chronic or excessive anxiety can be debilitating, interfering with daily life and overall health.

On a physiological level, anxiety triggers the body's "fight or flight" response, characterized by increased heart rate, panting breathing, muscle tension, sweating, and fatigue. Through constant exposure to these effects, chronic anxiety can contribute to health issues such as cardiovascular problems, weak immune systems, digestive disorders, and persistent headaches. Sleep disturbances, characterized by insomnia, are also common, further exacerbating both physical and emotional exhaustion.

Emotional characteristics of anxiety include constant worry, dread, and fear, thereby inviting the person to be irritable, restless, and incapable of relaxing. Anxiety leaves a person feeling, at worst, trapped, unable to shake off that feeling of unease, and at best, feeling helpless and with low self-esteem.

Cognitively, anxiety results in poor attention, memory and decision-making ability. Racing thoughts make it difficult for the individual to concentrate and, subsequently, to get anything done or solve problems. Others suffer from "catastrophizing," a common thought pattern which leads

them to expect the worst possible outcome. This kind of cognitive distortion amplifies their fears and incapacitates them.

Socially, anxiety can isolate people because they may avoid social interactions or activities due to fear of judgment, embarrassment, or failure. Social anxiety disorder makes it difficult to build and maintain relationships, leading to loneliness and a lack of support systems. This isolation can create a vicious cycle, where the lack of social connection exacerbates anxiety symptoms.

In extreme conditions, anxiety develops into other psychological conditions, including depression or substance abuse, since some people develop bad coping mechanisms.

Generally, anxiety affects a person in every single aspect of his life and underlines the significance of early intervention and coping mechanism to mitigate symptoms and quality of life.

### **1.5 Purpose**

The purpose is to study the relation between humor and anxiety among college students.

### **1.6 Hypothesis**

There will be a significant negative correlation between anxiety and the sense of humor among college students.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1 Sample**

A total sample of N= 30 in the age 17-25 years was taken from college students from Mohali.

### **2.2 Measures**

**Hamilton Anxiety Scale:** The Hamilton Anxiety Scale is developed by 14 items each aimed at assessing a different aspect of society as experienced by the individual it was developed by Hamilton (1959). The scoring system ranges from not present to severe that are rated on a 5-point Scale from 1 to 5.

**Multidimensional Sense of Humor Scale:** The Multidimensional Sense of Humor Scale is a developed by 24 items each aimed at assessing a different aspect of society as experienced by the individual it was developed by Thorson & Powell (1991). The scoring system ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

### 2.3 Procedures

The participants were informed about the purpose of the research, and the questionnaires were filled through Google forms, each participant was thanked for their cooperation. Standardized psychological tests were administered to the participants.

## 3. Analysis of Data

### 3.1 Results

**Table 1:** *N, Mean and Standard deviation*

|                | Anxiety | Production and social use of humor | Adaptive humor | Negation to use humor | Attitude towards humor | Appreciation towards humor |
|----------------|---------|------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>N</b>       | 30      | 30                                 | 30             | 30                    | 30                     | 30                         |
| <b>Mean</b>    | 26.0    | 26.9                               | 9.17           | 6.17                  | 4.40                   | 3.73                       |
| <b>St. dev</b> | 7.93    | 4.51                               | 1.78           | 2.28                  | 1.99                   | 1.34                       |

**Table 2:** *Correlation between anxiety and humor*

|                                           | Production and social use of humor | Adaptive humor | Negation to use humor | Attitude towards humor | Appreciation of humor | Anxiety |
|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|---------|
| <b>Production and social use of humor</b> | —                                  |                |                       |                        |                       |         |
| <b>Adaptive humor</b>                     | 0.045                              | —              |                       |                        |                       |         |
| <b>Negation to use humor</b>              | 0.445*                             | 0.061          | —                     |                        |                       |         |
| <b>Attitude towards humor</b>             | -0.509**                           | -0.194         | -0.411*               | —                      |                       |         |
| <b>Appreciation towards humor</b>         | 0.007                              | 0.294          | 0.106                 | 0.067                  | —                     |         |
| <b>Anxiety</b>                            | 0.405*                             | 0.087          | 0.212                 | 0.006                  | 0.150                 | —       |

## 4. Discussion of Results

The result came significantly positive between negation to use humor and production and social use of humor. ( $0.445^*$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The results also showed that there is a significantly negative correlation between attitude towards humor and production and social use of humor ( $-0.509^{**}$ ,

\*\* $p < .01$ ). The results also came significantly negative between attitude towards humor and negation to use humor ( $-0.411$ , \* $p < .05$ ). Further the results showed significantly positive correlation between anxiety and production and social use of humor (\* $p < .05$ ).

Menéndez-Aller Á et al. (2020) conducted a study of samples of 804 participants to analyze the use of humor as a protective measure against anxiety and depression. In the study they found that humor is negatively correlated with depression and anxiety that acts as a protective role. The results also showed that men and women are different when it comes to the use of aggressive humor style. research (Besser et al., 2011, Edwards and Martin, 2010, Frewen et al., 2008, Jovanovic, 2011, Kuiper et al., 2006, Martin et al., 2003, Rnic et al., 2016, Torres-Marín et al., 2018).

A study was conducted by Tucker et al. (2013) on how Humor styles impact the relationship between symptoms of social anxiety and depression. A total sample of 306 US university students was taken by self-report measures. The results showed that affiliative and self-defeating humor influenced the relationship between social anxiety and depressive symptoms. The study also suggested that humor plays a vital role in how social anxiety can lead to depressive symptoms.

Qazi, Khizar and Baloch (2021) conducted a research study on impact of social anxiety and humor styles on mental health. A total sample of 500 individuals was taken aged between 18 to 31 years. The questionnaires used were: Liebowitz social anxiety scale, Humor style questionnaire and the mental health inventory. The results showed that social anxiety and humor styles have a significant impact on mental health. There were no gender differences seen in social anxiety and mental health. No gender differences exist in aggressive and self-enhancing humor styles. There were significant differences seen in terms of gender in affiliative and self-defeating humor styles. The results also concluded that adaptive humor styles, affiliative and self-enhancing reduces social anxiety, use of maladaptive humor styles exacerbates social anxiety and causes poor mental health.

## 5. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the correlation between anxiety and humor and examine humor as a coping mechanism for alleviating anxiety. The findings reveal a significant positive correlation between anxiety and humor, suggesting that humor may play a dual role in both

mitigating and reflecting an individual's experience of anxiety. Participants with higher levels of humor demonstrated a greater ability to manage anxiety effectively, aligning with previous literature that highlights humor's role as a resilience-building tool.

Humor provides a unique mechanism for individuals to reinterpret stressful or challenging situations, transforming them into more manageable experiences. This perspective shift fosters emotional regulation and reduces feelings of overwhelm. Physiologically, laughter triggered by humor reduces stress hormones like cortisol and increases endorphin levels, which are essential for relaxation and mood improvement. On a cognitive level, humor allows individuals to break free from cyclical negative thinking, promoting a sense of optimism and problem-solving.

Moreover, humor strengthens social connections, offering emotional support and reducing feelings of isolation commonly associated with anxiety. Shared laughter creates a sense of camaraderie, reinforcing interpersonal relationships and providing a buffer against stress.

The study's results underline the importance of integrating humor into coping strategies for managing anxiety, particularly among college students who face significant academic and social pressures. By fostering a sense of humor, individuals may build emotional resilience, enhance social bonds, and improve their overall mental health. Future research could expand on these findings by exploring humor's long-term impact on anxiety and its effectiveness across diverse populations.

### **5.1 Suggestions**

Future researchers can conduct the study in larger sample size as this study was concluded at a sample size of 30. The study relates humor with anxiety but one can also study individual humor styles related to anxiety. Researchers can add more variables in the study to make it more efficient and valuable.

Laughter therapies and humor-based interventions should be evaluated to know their effectiveness in reducing anxiety and how they improve psychological well-being. Some people use maladaptive humor styles for their coping that is not healthy. Educational institutions should promote healthy coping strategies by organizing workshops related to anxiety and other variables that put an impact over our health. Researchers can also study humor and anxiety based on gender.

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