

Study on the Status Quo and Adjustment of Anxiety in Postgraduate Students: a Case Study of j University

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Abstract: With the rapid growth of China's economy, the demand for highly educated personnel in enterprises and public institutions is also increasing, coupled with the implementation of China's postgraduate enrollment expansion policy, the number of postgraduate entrance examination students is increasing, in such circumstances, the students have a restless anxiety. Nowadays, postgraduate entrance examination anxiety has become a common phenomenon. The mental health of postgraduate entrance examination students has seriously affected the results of postgraduate entrance examination as well as their physical and mental health. Taking jinan university as an example, through questionnaire investigation, one's deceased father grind students' anxiety status are analyzed in detail to know its Angle of unsuspecting target, difficult, physiology Angle of physical deterioration, body weakness, psychology Angle of the lost, deny yourself, uneasy, concerns about excessive attention Angle, awareness of one's deceased father grind the severity of anxiety research object. Combined with the interview method, the non-structured interview method is adopted to more accurately analyze the factors that affect the subjects' anxiety about taking the postgraduate entrance examination, and carry out a comprehensive analysis from four aspects of study, employment, emotion and life. Finally, through the analysis of the current situation of postgraduate entrance exam anxiety by questionnaire survey and the influencing factors of postgraduate entrance exam anxiety by interview method, relevant adjustment suggestions are put forward for students themselves, families and schools.

Keywords: Postgraduate Students; Anxiety; Adjustment

1. Foreword

In recent years, China's rapid economic growth has driven surging demand for highly educated professionals across enterprises and institutions. Since the implementation of expanded graduate enrollment policies, postgraduate entrance exam applications have experienced exponential growth. In 2022, 4.57 million applicants registered for master's programs nationwide, marking an 800,000 increase (21%) from 2021. Data shows a 510,000 surge in 2020 compared to 2019, followed by a 360,000 jump in 2021. The trend has maintained high growth rates since 2016, with a seven-year average increase of 15.8% between 2015 and 2022. The devaluation of academic credentials has become an undeniable reality, while the proportion of graduates holding postgraduate degrees continues to rise steadily. According to China Education Online's "2022 National Postgraduate Enrollment Survey Report", persistent application enthusiasm remains overshadowed by employment pressures. Expanding university enrollments and increasing bachelor's graduates have intensified job competition, driving up postgraduate applicants. As higher education becomes more widespread and employers raise educational requirements, this upward spiral of exam fever is likely to continue. Under these circumstances, students face growing anxiety. Current domestic research predominantly focuses on junior or senior high school students' exam preparation stress, with relatively limited studies targeting postgraduate candidates. Among postgraduate entrance exam candidates, current-year students and those from previous years constitute the largest proportion. These students simultaneously bear pressures from family, financial burdens, and employment challenges, leading to varying degrees of anxiety. As a large group, postgraduate candidates exhibit widespread

anxiety that has become a prevalent phenomenon. Through empirical research on the anxiety status of this student population, this study aims to analyze the sustained rise in exam enthusiasm and provide recommendations and strategies for reasonable adjustment.

2. Review of Exam Anxiety

Research on exam anxiety in China has been extensive. First, studies on exam phenomena reveal varying levels of anxiety among different groups. Zhang Yuli conducted experimental research on college students' exam anxiety, finding that both male and female students experience this phenomenon [1]. Compared to general exam anxiety, research on postgraduate entrance exam anxiety remains relatively limited in China, with significant differences in academic backgrounds. From a psychological perspective, Chen Zhuo (Master's student at Inner Mongolia Normal University) utilized indoor therapy to alleviate exam anxiety among college students [2]. Scholars like Sun Aixue, Zhou Xuesnow, and Cheng Shuying employed music therapy to positively influence candidates' mental and physical states, thereby reducing anxiety [3]. Chen Yan examined correlations between junior high school students' exam anxiety, coping strategies, confidence, and motivation from an educational perspective [4]. Finally, Shen Lujun's study on factors influencing teacher trainees' exam anxiety through group counseling significantly enriched research on exam anxiety factors via questionnaire surveys [5]. As a uniquely Chinese phenomenon, exam anxiety lacks comparable foreign research. While international literature primarily focuses on graduate employment anxiety, these studies offer valuable references for understanding exam anxiety in China.

3. Anxiety Status of Graduate Students in J University

To investigate anxiety levels among postgraduate entrance exam candidates, a questionnaire survey method was employed. The "Current Status Survey of Postgraduate Exam Anxiety" was developed through interviews with students and literature review. The study adopted a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=neutral, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree), with anxiety

severity increasing progressively. Participants were categorized into three levels: those scoring below 45 (no anxiety), 45-60 (moderate anxiety), and 60+ (severe anxiety). A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed, with 193 valid responses collected after excluding 7 invalid ones, achieving a 96.5% response rate.

3.1 Weak Constitution, Weak Body

The decline in physical fitness and general weakness are particularly evident among postgraduate entrance exam candidates during the mid-term phase, as revealed through physiological analysis and interviews. Many students spend their study sessions in overcrowded libraries or cram schools – spaces that inevitably become packed with peers. The daily grind of studying in cramped areas creates significant stress. With summer's peak heat waves, air-conditioned study spaces become essential, while the sweltering weather often causes physical discomfort. As academic demands intensify, students must juggle intensive coursework with minimal leisure time, leading to reduced exercise and declining physical condition. Compounding these challenges, roommates who aren't preparing for exams may stay up late due to personal reasons, disrupting sleep patterns and causing both physical and mental fatigue – a double whammy that naturally weakens overall health.

3.2 Restless and Difficult to be at Ease

The analysis of emotional patterns and interviews with postgraduate entrance exam candidates reveal a prevalent state of restlessness and anxiety. During the preparatory phase, students grapple with critical life decisions: whether to pursue graduate studies or face the daunting reality of job market competition. These choices inevitably spark internal conflicts, compounded by various factors that contribute to varying degrees of stress. Many candidates lack sufficient understanding of exam content or even their intended subjects, leading to anxiety during material collection. Moreover, selecting target institutions remains a major dilemma for many—uncertain about available options, uncertain about school quality, and uncertain if their chosen institution aligns with their capabilities. This uncertainty ultimately manifests as restlessness and difficulty in

settling into the exam preparation process.

3.3 Lost Myself and Denied Myself

The phenomenon of self-loss and self-denial becomes particularly evident in postgraduate entrance exam candidates during mid-to-late stages of preparation, as revealed through psychological analysis and interviews. While many students have established structured study routines with systematic subject-specific learning, some begin to doubt their academic efficiency. This uncertainty stems from two primary factors: constant comparisons with peers that unconsciously influence self-assessment, and growing skepticism about the value of their efforts versus potential rewards. Some even question their original motivations for pursuing graduate studies and the significance of persevering. Such internal conflicts inevitably breed negative self-perception, leading to self-denial that undermines study effectiveness. Particularly during intense exam preparation periods, this pressure intensifies, potentially causing mild cognitive impairment or severe psychological distress. In extreme cases, it may trigger inferiority complexes and radical shifts in personal values and life perspectives.

3.4 Restless and Over-Worrying

Anxiety and excessive worry are particularly evident in postgraduate entrance exam candidates' attention patterns, as revealed through behavioral analysis and interviews. Many students view the exam as their most crucial life-altering opportunity, believing academic success largely depends on its outcome. While envisioning a successful path brings temporary satisfaction, the possibility of failure triggers intense anxiety. This mental tug-of-war causes distraction, diverting focus to unnecessary worries. Some candidates struggle with information gathering, school selection, and study plan formulation from the preparation phase. Midway through the process, they become overly concerned about progress delays. As the exam approaches, mounting pressure drives them into self-doubt and excessive worry cycles, ultimately concentrating all energy on exam preparation.

4. The Reasons for Anxiety Among Graduate Students in J University

4.1 Study Pressure

During exam preparation, moderate academic pressure can unlock our potential and motivation, boosting performance and enhancing learning efficiency. However, interviews reveal that many students experience prolonged mental tension due to self-doubt about their foundation and excessive test anxiety, leading to chronic stress. In 2018, researchers including Lin Guotian, Zhang Jingyin, and Yang Yaying conducted a survey of 237 medical postgraduate candidates to assess anxiety levels, identify contributing factors, and propose mitigation strategies. The findings indicated that school environment, exam attitudes, and gender significantly influenced anxiety levels [6]. Critical factors such as school selection, study material acquisition, and exam preparation progress all substantially impact preparation outcomes. This demonstrates that balanced academic pressure can drive focused effort and creative problem-solving, potentially yielding remarkable results. Conversely, excessive pressure escalates anxiety, impairing both learning effectiveness and the normal performance of existing capabilities.

4.2 Employment Pressure

During graduation season, some students choose to pursue postgraduate studies while others opt for employment. When these students receive attractive job offers, those preparing for graduate entrance exams inevitably feel heightened anxiety—a phenomenon particularly evident among graduates from previous years. Researcher Liu Bin identified "avoidance-oriented postgraduate preparation," where students select advanced education to escape employment pressures, often losing rational judgment under such stress [6]. Additionally, families that lack support for postgraduate ambitions, expecting children to enter society early or secure government positions in state-owned enterprises, further intensify academic pressure. Therefore, the employment challenges faced by students who decide to pursue graduate studies during this critical period become a key factor contributing to exam-related anxiety.

4.3 Relationship Stress

The postgraduate entrance exam journey is

destined to be a solitary endeavor. Unlike the college entrance exam where students follow structured class schedules with teachers' guidance, this test requires complete self-discipline. The real challenges lie in overcoming personal inertia and emotional resistance. As academic preparation demands independent information gathering and school selection decisions from the very start, it significantly shapes one's growth while presenting formidable obstacles. The mid-year period becomes the most intense phase, with sweltering heat causing irritability. Combined with academic pressure, this often leads to emotional turbulence – in severe cases, even complete breakdowns may occur when minor setbacks trigger uncontrollable outbursts.

Due to the high intensity of study, students themselves are highly nervous and sensitive. In this state, it is easy to have various problems in dealing with interpersonal relationships. Therefore, emotion is also a kind of pressure that seriously affects the study of postgraduate entrance examination, which leads to anxiety among students.

4.4 Economic Pressures

Economic factors have become a critical challenge for postgraduate entrance exam candidates, particularly affecting seniors and past graduates. Having already graduated or nearing graduation, these students face unprecedented pressure as they juggle full-time careers with the demanding preparation for postgraduate studies. Many candidates develop anxiety and frustration during their exam preparation process, a situation that proves especially challenging for those juggling both work commitments and academic preparations. Many graduates find it difficult to approach their parents about starting a career after graduation. Some students feel their academic performance is subpar, preferring offline tutoring from private institutions. However, these courses often come with hefty fees, creating financial burdens that intensify their anxiety. This reveals how life pressures significantly contribute to the anxiety experienced by postgraduate entrance exam candidates.

5. Conclusion and Suggestion

This study employed literature review and questionnaire surveys, supplemented by

unstructured interviews to analyze factors influencing postgraduate entrance exam candidates. These research methods provided robust support for the investigation. By distributing analytical questionnaires, we focused on assessing the current state of anxiety among examinees, gaining insights into their emotional restlessness and restlessness, physical decline and frailty, psychological self-doubt and identity confusion, as well as mental agitation and excessive worry. The questionnaire method proved particularly suitable for investigating anxiety prevalence among postgraduate candidates, as anxiety is a common phenomenon with diverse manifestations. With a large sample size from questionnaire responses, different anxiety statuses became more apparent. Building on this foundation, unstructured interviews were conducted to precisely identify contributing factors, examining four key areas: academic performance, career planning, emotional well-being, and daily life. Targeted interviews based on questionnaire findings enhanced the systematic and scientific nature of the research. The analysis reveals that anxiety has become a widespread issue among postgraduate candidates, making its alleviation particularly crucial.

In order to better alleviate the anxiety of postgraduate students, the author puts forward the following positive suggestions:

5.1 For Student

Set clear goals for each stage of your journey. For every phase, establish specific objectives and work through them step by step. Having defined goals helps cut through aimless hesitation and builds steadfast determination. When you achieve milestones, reward yourself with positive reinforcement this lets you witness steady progress, giving you a solid foundation and a sense of accomplishment. If things don't go as planned, don't let it derail your momentum. It might just mean the strategy isn't perfect for you yet. In such cases, make strategic adjustments. View it as a process of continuous refinement each tweak brings you closer to your best self, steering you toward better outcomes. Talk to family and friends. When you're feeling down and need someone to vent to, reach out to close family members or friends, or talk to seniors who've successfully pursued graduate studies.

Sometimes talking it out is better than bottling up your feelings. We especially recommend confiding in those who've already passed the entrance exams .they've been through this journey before and often understand your struggles better. Plus, since they've gone through the process themselves, their advice carries more weight and can be motivating. If you prefer not to talk, try journaling that's also a great way to relieve stress.

5.2 For Family

Respect your child's decision. At this critical juncture in life, students face a vital crossroads between entering the workforce or pursuing further education. While teenagers are developing their own perspectives, parents should demonstrate understanding and support for their choices. Regardless of which path they choose, steadfast backing remains essential throughout their journey.

Communicate more with your child. Preparing for postgraduate entrance exams requires complete self-discipline, challenging both mental resilience and emotional stability. The academic journey is a solitary path where students must prepare extensively from the start. Excessive study pressure often leads to emotional breakdowns. This is when parent-child communication becomes crucial. Effective communication can alleviate anxiety and ease their worries through meaningful dialogue.

5.3 For School

Explain the essentials of postgraduate entrance exams. The exam preparation process is essentially an information battle, where students face multiple challenges: gathering study materials, selecting suitable universities, developing effective study methods, and boosting review efficiency. By collaborating with exam prep institutions or inviting renowned exam experts to conduct seminars, university professors can help students gain a strategic advantage in this information-driven competition.

Psychological counseling services are provided for postgraduate entrance exam candidates.

When conducting a consultation and assessment of a senior female student's pre-exam anxiety, Zhang Ping employed the Rational Emotive Therapy (RET) from cognitive psychology to alleviate her anxiety, achieving positive therapeutic outcomes ^[7]. Many students develop prolonged mental tension due to excessive exam-related worries and concerns about interpersonal relationships, leading to chronic anxiety. Schools should offer psychological support during periods when students feel restless and unable to focus, thereby enhancing their psychological resilience for postgraduate entrance exams.

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