

# **Association between emotions and General Anxiety Disorder (GAD) among insurance expatriates in Juba, South Sudan**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This aimed at exploring the association between emotions and General Anxiety Disorder (GAD). The study was carried out among insurance expatriates in Juba, South Sudan between September 2020 and July 2021. A sample size of 66 insurance expatriates participated in the study. The findings indicated that there was a significant effect of emotions on general anxiety disorder at the  $p < .05$  [ $F(1, 55) = 8.543, p = 0.005$ ]. This demonstrates that emotions determine general anxiety disorder such that the higher the emotions, the higher the general anxiety disorder. Implications of these findings for clinical practice is discussed.*

**Keywords:** Emotions, general anxiety disorder, GAD, insurance expatriates, Juba.

## **1. Introduction**

Emotional support is vital in lowering depression, stress, and anxiety to improve psychological and mental wellbeing among expatriates (Pannetier et al., 2017). Emotional stability is influenced by the prevalence of GAD related disorders such as stress and depression (Kader et al., 2017). In many countries with a high number of immigrants, refugees, and expatriates, the emotional imbalance among the resident results from continued conflicts that attract stress, depression, and post-traumatic stress (Housen et al., 2017). Expatriates working in Asian multinationals experienced regular cases of stress and anxiety due to instability in emotions enabled by the new and diverse work situations (Koyama et al., 2016). Foreigners rely on psychological support to adjust their emotional abilities to the new work and social setting (Sterle et al., 2018). Diverse emotional skills among expatriates affect the capabilities to adjust to the new work settings (Okpara, 2016).

Migrants in different parts of the world have high risks of enduring mental health problems that undermine their health and performance in their workplaces. Most African migrants in European countries encounter stressors at the new destination, which endangers their mental health (Pannetier et al., 2017). Some of the Africans living in European countries fled their home countries due to political and economic unrest. The unplanned migration leads to GAD with significant effects on women. During the migration and living in a foreign country, the migrants need emotional support that reduces psychological distress and anxiety. The social support on migrants and expatriates helps them cope up with the mental disorders and the associated emotions. Housen et al. (2017) assert that emotional support is essential to expatriates experiencing psychological distress. Expatriates need adequate help during the relocation process to effectively execute their duties. Adapting to the environment and culture is a

challenge among expatriates. Some expatriates adjust to the new culture, while others experience psychological distress. Expatriates who have supporting families receive emotional support and have adequate time to settle in new environments. Cross-cultural training also provides expatriates with an opportunity to adjust to the new environment.

Expatriates working in developing countries such as South Sudan needed support from the families for them to adjust quickly in their areas of work. Social integration is a challenge among expatriates due to ethnic profiling and gender-based violence in the country. Mental health problems are prevalent among the expatriates and families in South Sudan due to the constant insecurity that originates from the ethnic clashes, violence, and expatriates profiling. The absence of a support network on psychological support on expatriates enduring anxiety affects their work performance. According to Housen et al. (2017), the adjustment challenges also lead to mental health problems among the expatriates. Most expatriates are unfamiliar with such challenges and need emotional support to overcome general anxiety disorder.

Van der Laken et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis of the differential benefits of social support among expatriates. The authors indicated that social support programs on expatriates focused on the mental health wellbeing help in the management of general anxiety disorder before they escalate. High work demands and cross-cultural challenges are causes of stress and anxiety among expatriates and support is needed for them to overcome the problem. Mental training helps employers determine the psychological challenges affecting expatriates. The social support made through mental aid contributes to the expatriates' adjustment, organizational commitment, and retention (Van der Laken et al., 2019). The support ensures that psychological distress is managed, and the expatriates adapt quickly in the new environment. International assignments offer expatriates an opportunity to acquire cross-cultural skills, but the process is challenging due to the general anxiety disorder that is involved in the process. Thus, the expatriates need constant social support from the family, colleagues, and employers.

Further, the challenges in emotional balance among expatriates working in African countries is attributed to the rise in anxiety disorders and these foreign professionals. The increase in cases of hypertension among foreigners in Ghana and Nigeria has been linked to emotional instability, including anxiety and stress (Ademola et al., 2019). In Somalia and South Sudan, the prevalence of terror attacks, civil war, and other conflicts has led to the development of fear and emotional imbalances among locals and foreigners (Giorgi et al., 2016). Due to these conflicts, the levels of emotional stability influence the success of foreigners in successfully holding jobs and managing businesses.

Fee et al. (2019) asserted that hostility in the host environment affects the emotional stability of expatriates. The lack of adequate safety and security measures for foreigners has increased the levels of emotional instability. Therefore, emotional support is vital in helping refugees and expatriates to fit into new and volatile environments (Adaku et al., 2016). The success of relief and humanitarian workers in developing countries such as South Sudan is affected by the ability to achieve emotional stability that is essential in managing anxiety and other psychological disorders (Strohmeier et al., 2018).

## **2. Methods and Procedures**

The study used a combination of an ex post facto and phenomenological research design. Emotional

stability was measured at 3 levels vis high, low, and none. The level of anxiety was also measured in 3 levels namely: High/Severe, Moderate, Mild, and Low/Minimal. Phenomenological research design enabled the researcher to collect lived experiences of participants through interviews and supported the quantitative data. The emotional stability was measured using an emotional scale. The selected participants were emailed with details of the interviews including a summarized schedule of questions

**2. Results**

The objective of the study was to understand the relationship between emotions and General Anxiety Disorder among insurance expatriates in Juba, South Sudan. Descriptive analysis was done, and results were presented in frequencies and percentages in Table 1.

**Table 1: Emotions and General Anxiety Disorder**

		General Anxiety Disorder			Total	
		Low	Moderate	High		
Emotions	Higher	Count	1	24	25	50
		% within Emotions	2.0%	48.0%	50.0%	100.0%
		% within General anxiety	50.0%	80.0%	100.0%	87.7%
	Less	Count	1	6	0	7
		% within Emotions	14.3%	85.7%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within General anxiety	50.0%	20.0%	0.0%	12.3%
Total		Count	2	30	25	57
		% within Emotions	3.5%	52.6%	43.9%	100.0%
		% within General anxiety	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 1 shows that 2% of participants with higher emotions had low general anxiety disorder, 48% had moderate general anxiety disorder and 50% had high general anxiety disorder. Among participants with less emotions, 14.3% had low general anxiety disorder, 85.7% had moderate general anxiety disorder and none had high general anxiety disorder.

To determine whether the descriptive results of the relationship between emotions and general anxiety disorder was statistically significant, a one-way between subjects’ ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of emotions on general anxiety disorder on whether the higher the emotions, the higher the general anxiety disorder. The hypothesis posed was: There is no statistical significance between emotions and GAD among insurance expatriates in Juba, South Sudan. Table 2 presents the results.

**Table 1: ANOVA of emotions and General Anxiety Disorder**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.382	1	2.382	8.543	.005
Within Groups	15.337	55	.279		
Total	17.719	56			

Source: Researcher, 2021

Table 2 shows that there was a significant effect of emotions on general anxiety disorder at the  $p < .05$  [ $F(1, 55) = 8.543, p = 0.005$ ]. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This shows that emotions determine general anxiety disorder such that the higher the emotions, the higher the general anxiety disorder.

Emotions have a direct impact on general anxiety disorder. A range of workplace issues leads to adverse effects that increase the probability of developing a general anxiety disorder. The challenges experienced by insurance expatriates increase their stress levels leading to general anxiety disorder. Work pressure in a foreign country affects expatriates and raises the possibility of developing a general anxiety disorder. On the other hand, positive emotions in the workplace lead to favorable outcomes. The emotions motivate employees, which increases organization profits. Also, positive emotions lead improves the health outcomes of the employees.

Challenges in Juba, such as insecurity, internal conflicts, and political struggles, affect expatriates' emotions leading to stress, anxiety, and depression. Pannetier et al. (2017) found out that emotional instability leads to psychological distress among the expatriates in European and Asian countries. The challenge is also experienced by South Sudanese expatriates. Although expatriates in other developed countries have adequate psychological support whenever they endure emotional instability, South Sudan is still developing health care system. Most expatriates enduring emotional instability have ended up developing general anxiety disorder that affects their careers. According to the results, most insurance expatriates have suffered from general anxiety disorder due to emotional instability.

Social integration remains a considerable challenge for expatriates across the world. Living away from home is a burden to most expatriates who always lived close to their friends and family. In a foreign country, expatriates endure social integration challenges that affect their psychological wellbeing. Most expatriates in Juba who are discriminated at the workplace and within the social environment have unstable emotions. Such expatriates feel alienated and adopt seclusion because they have no immediate friends to help them recover. Continuous exposure to discrimination makes them have psychological disorders. Although people have emotions in life, the drastic change of emotions within an extended period leads to stress and depression.

The ability to control emotions is different depending on the challenges individuals endure in life. Due to the nature of the working and living environment in Juba, expatriates often endure different emotions such as fear, anger, and sadness. The expatriates also endure shame, embarrassment, and guilt, which affect their psychological wellbeing. Continuous exposure to the risk factors destabilizes their emotions.

Negative emotions accumulate and manifest in forms of anxiety and stress. Some expatriates find the challenge so unbearable and decide to quit their jobs. Others strive to seek psychological support and believe that one day everything shall be well.

Emotional support is vital to help expatriates adapt to the new working environment. However, the hostility faced by insurance and other expatriates in South Sudan contributes to their emotional instability. Although individuals are trying to move away from the emotions, it is overwhelming. Generally, negative emotions are not harmful because they help persons endure resilience in doing something or adapting to a particular environment. However, expatriates are exposed to a specific environment whereby they live in fear and anger. In such circumstances, some people speak out and seek help while others remain silent hence having psychological disorders.

Van der Laken et al. (2019) found out that it is challenging for the expatriates to achieve emotional stability in insecure environments. Emotional stability helps expatriates overcome stressful situations in the workplace and living environment. Most expatriates in foreign countries experience conflicts in work and family life and abrupt turnover that undermine their psychological wellbeing. Although expatriates are different, some are adaptive to unfriendly environments while others are overwhelmed. Expatriates who are emotionally stable and ready to explore new experiences tend to balance their emotions in foreign countries. Extraverts are better in forming social networks in a new environment, which helps them adapt quickly to a foreign country. The social network formed by extraverts builds its emotional and informational support, which allows them to succeed in expatriates' assignments.

The results from this study demonstrated that most employees endured emotional imbalance leading to general anxiety disorder. The results implied that only a few insurance expatriates in Juba are extraverts. Relocating to a foreign country where culture, environment, and people are new sometimes becomes very stressful (Van der Laken et al., 2019). The ability of expatriates to achieve emotional stability in such situations is an overwhelming task. In Juba, some challenges, such as conflicts and political wrangles, affect expatriates most who cannot handle and manage the consequences. Culture shock and living environment stressors overwhelm people who are ill-prepared to adapt to the living conditions in a new country (Ademola et al., 2019). Also, some individuals do not understand how to interact with people exhibiting a foreign culture, which adversely complicates their living conditions in a foreign country.

Relocating to a foreign country in search of employment opportunities is good, but the companies have the responsibility to ensure expatriates can adapt quickly to the new environment. Most expatriates in Juba have failed to stabilize their emotions because they were not prepared to work in such an environment. Most insurance expatriates prioritized the jobs without evaluating the working environment, culture shock, and other challenges that could contribute to psychological disorders. According to Ademola et al. (2019), when the expatriates show resilience, they can cope up with the stressors that affect their emotional balance.

## 5. Implications

Crucial actions and approaches need to be instigated by employers and professional counselors to help insurance and other expatriates in Juba, South Sudan, to cope with emotional issues that trigger general anxiety disorder. Support groups should be established to help insurance expatriates showing signs of emotional instability, a condition that is likely to trigger general anxiety.

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