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Anxiety in the workplace and personality: Differences between the general population and anxious patients in Buenos Aires (Argentina): Preliminary findings



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BLACKGROUND

Work is an important aspect of people lives, and therefore exerts influence on the general wellbeing of the individual (Warr, 2002). Although dealing with some degree of anxiety is expected at the time of carrying out a work task, it's important to recognize that this emotion can play a positive or negative role for the worker and the organization (Bogiaizian, Solari, Maglio & López Salazar, 2016). In addition, the workplace may be a facilitating context for the development and maintenance of anxiety. Indeed, there are social hierarchies, possible conflicts with colleagues and superiors, uncertainty about income and job security and expectations about performance (Muschalla & Linden, 2013).

In recent years, anxiety at the workplace has received more attention from researchers (Muschalla, Heldmann & Fay, 2013; Muschalla & Linden, 2013; Bogiaizian, Solari, Maglio & López Salazar, 2016). However, this phenomenon has yet been little investigated in the working population. And specially among argentinean workers.

Workplace Anxiety has been defined as the specific pattern of performance, in relation to the task and context, determined by the individual need to anticipate or prevent certain work-related outcomes (Bogiaizian, Solari, Maglio & López Salazar, 2016).

The present study aims to examine the differences in Workplace Anxiety between the general population and individuals with anxious psychopathology among argentinean workers, taking also into account specific work variables (being in charge of personnel) and personality traits.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

Using a non-probabilistic sample method two groups of workers were studied. The participants filled a series of psychological measures and signed an informed consent, assuring confidentiality and ethical care of the data.

Group 1 included 202 workers from the general population. The mean age was 36 years (SD 12.2) and gender distribution was 37.3% male and 62.7% female, with an average of 14.4 years of total job experience (SD 11.1). In addition, Group 2 included 74 patients from an Anxiety Disorders Clinic in Buenos Aires, Argentina, all currently workers. The mean age was 36 years (SD 10,4) and gender distribution was 59,5% male and 40,5% female, with an average of 14.1 years of total job experience (SD 9,1). Principal diagnosis were distributed as follow: PD 17,6%; OCD 17,6%; SAD 37,8% and GAD 27%.

MEASURES

The Workplace Anxiety Inventory (Bogiaizian, Solari, Maglio & López Salazar, 2016), is a 31-item self-report measure designed to assess how anxiety affects the performance of individuals at work. Each item on the measure is rated on a 5-point scale (0=Never; 1=Almost Never; 2=Sometimes; 3=Most of the time; and 4=Always). Workplace Anxiety Inventory is composed by two subscales: Worry and Feelings of Tension at Work Profile and Social Anxiety and Reassurance Seeking at Work Profile that operationalize different modes of functioning in the work context. The measure has shown adequate indicators of factorial validity, concurrent validity, and reliability (Bogiaizian, Solari, Maglio & López Salazar, 2016)

In addition, well stablished measures were administered to better assess psychological variables (general anxiety and personality) of the workers sample. These included, the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI, Spielberger, Gorsuch, Lushene, 1986) and the NEO-Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI, McCrae, & Costa, 2004)

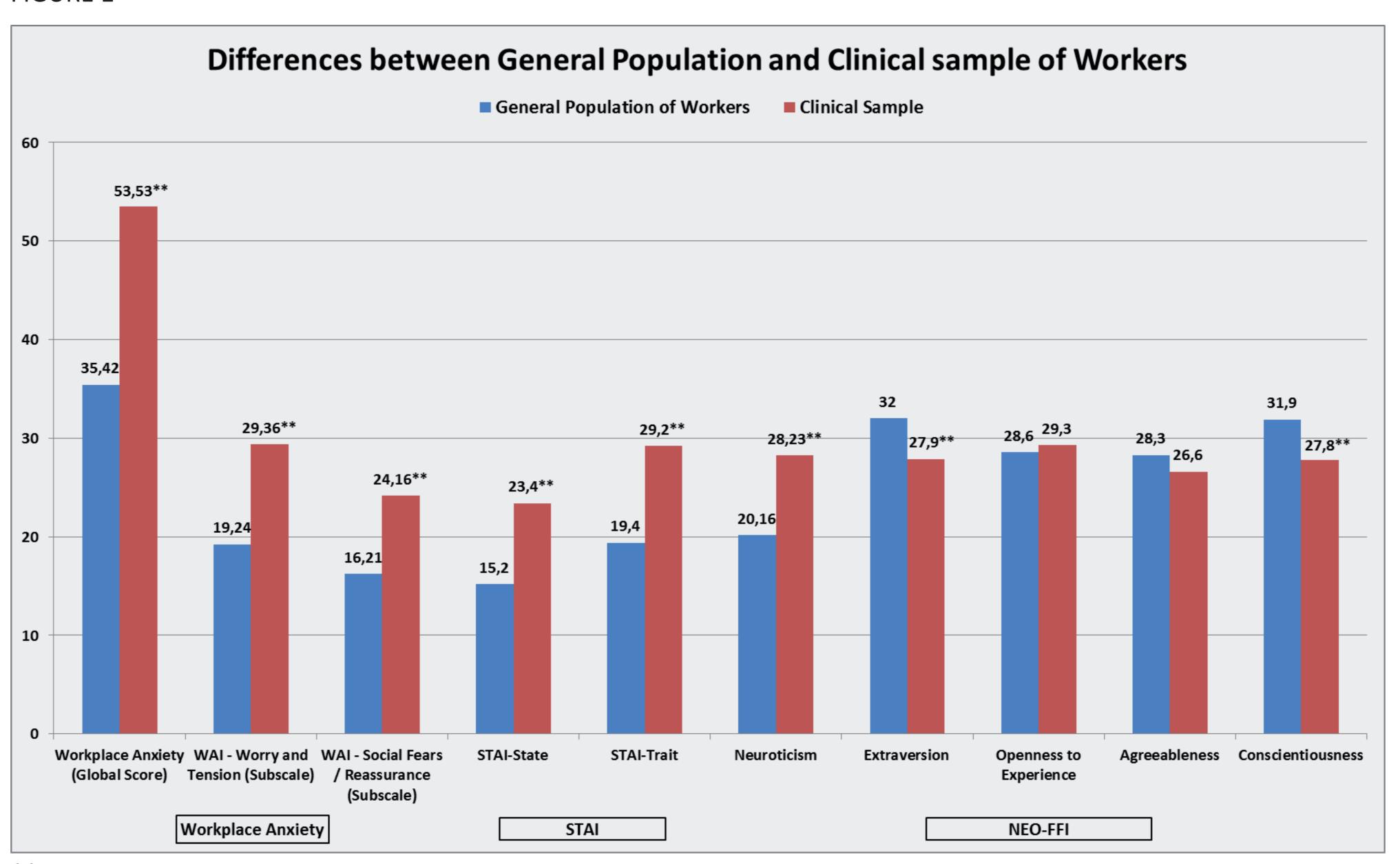
PROCEDURES

To examine differences among groups of workers and work-related variables (being in charge of personnel), T-test for independent groups procedures were applied. To examine the association between variables, Pearson's bi-variate correlations were calculated. In both procedures, statistical significance was stablished with a p value of <.05.

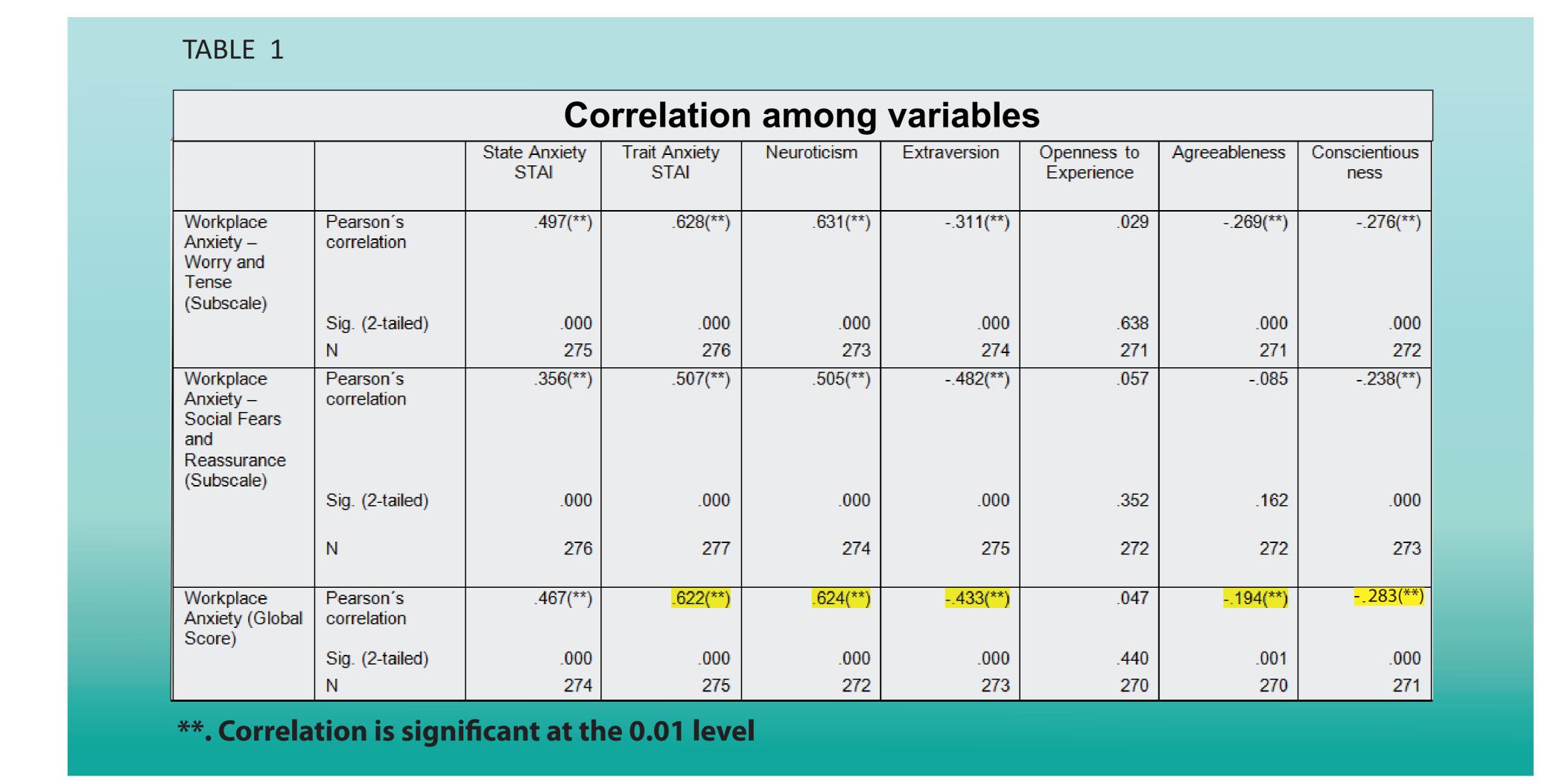
RESULTS

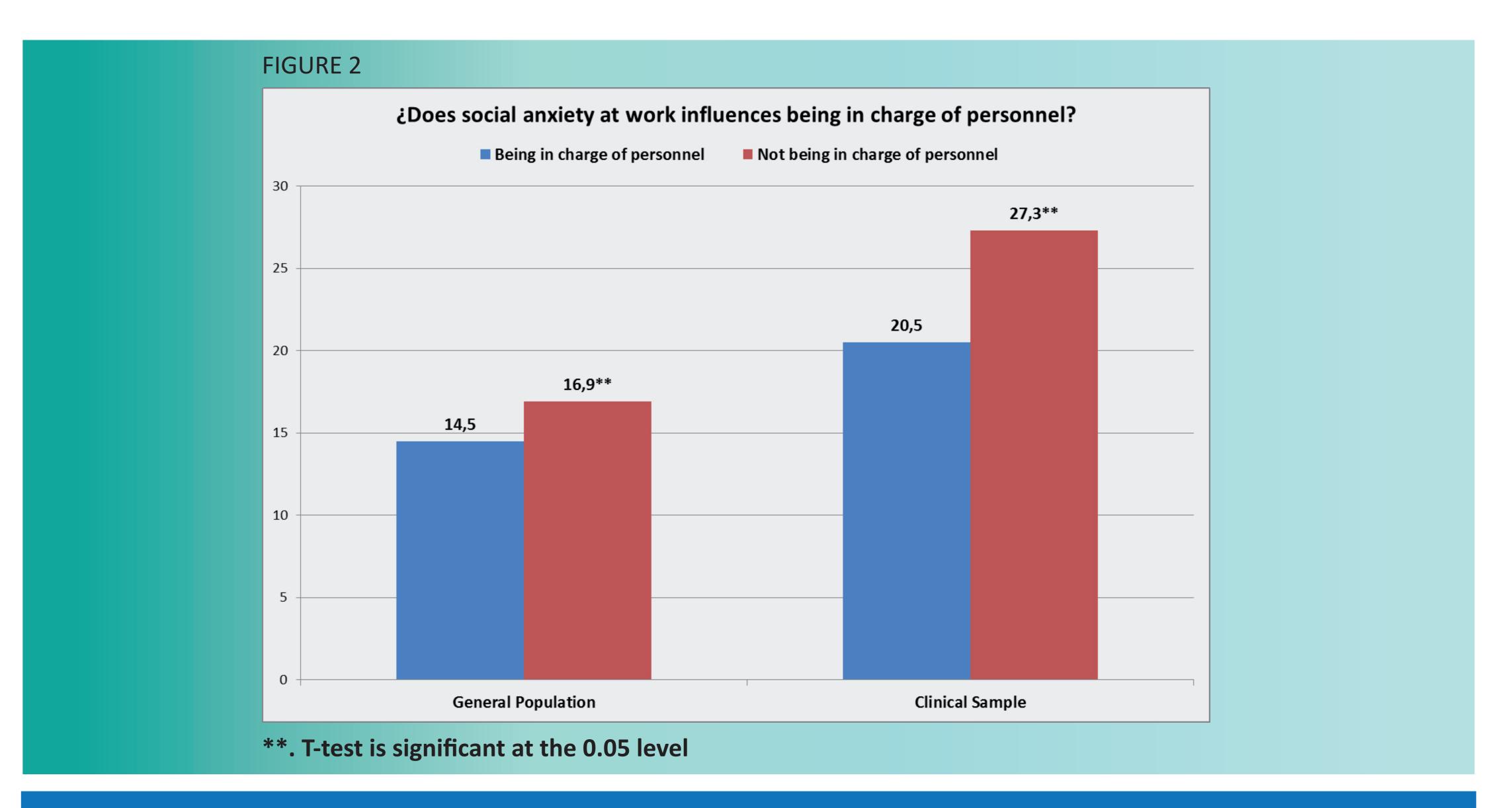
No differences of statistical significance were found taking into account age and gender. Main results are shown in Figure 1, Table 1 and Figure 2.

FIGURE 1



**. T-test is significant at the 0.05 level





DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The present findings show differences of statistical significance between the general population and a clinical sample of workers. As expected, the clinical group exhibited higher scores on workplace anxiety and it's subscales, reflecting that individuals with anxious psychopathology tend to work with more symptoms of tension, worry and anxiety about their performance. Regarding state and trait anxiety, the same tendency was observed, with the clinical group showing overall higher scores. Concerning differences in personality traits, as expected, the clinical group exhibited higher scores in neuroticism and lower levels of extraversion than the general population of workers. Surprisingly, conscientiousness was also lower.

The study also explored correlations among different variables. In particular, Workplace Anxiety exhibited a moderate-strong correlation with trait anxiety and neuroticism, suggesting that Workplace Anxiety could be considered a way of being at work (prone to worry and anxiety), in other words, a stable pattern of performance.

Regarding work-related variables, the present study found that among individuals (general population and clinical sample) with higher scores of Social Anxiety and Reassurance Seeking at Work Subscale showed difficulties with being in charge of personnel, adding to the idea that social anxiety issues may affect job development. The current study has some limitations. The findings are constrained to a small size and sample characteristics

(argentinean workers). Future research should focus on differences between different anxiety disorders, and include other personality measures.

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