

A STUDY OF SOCIAL ANXIETY AND NEGATIVE EVALUATIONS AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

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Abstract

The sole purpose of this study was to find out the relations between Social Anxiety and Fear of negative evaluation among Young Adults. The sample of 160 young adults was randomly selected from different educational institutions like Chandigarh, Mohali and Panchkula.. The Brief fear of negative evaluation scale (Leary, 1983) and Social Anxiety Scale (Liebowitz, 1987) were applied to collect the data. The Pearson correlation and t-test were used to test the hypotheses. The obtained results revealed that there is a positive relationship between social anxiety and fear of negative evaluation ($r = .27, p < .05$) & there exists a significant difference between the mean scores of social anxiety and fear of negative evaluation (2.13, t -value $< .05$) among young adults.

Key words: Social anxiety, Negative evaluation, Fear, young adults.

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Introduction

It is common for individuals to experience anxiety in response to stress, and in certain situations, this reaction can be beneficial. Anxiety serves as a signal for potential threats and aids in both planning and focus. However, in the presence of anxiety disorders, there is an excessive and disproportionate sense of dread or anxiety, differing from the typical feelings of apprehension or unease.

The National Institute of Health defines Social anxiety disorder, also known as social phobia, is an anxiety disorder involving discomfort around social interaction, and concern about being embarrassed and judged by others. This discomfort will be experienced as fear and anxiety, and will be accompanied by autonomic arousal, including diaphoresis, apnea, tremors, tachycardia, and nausea (ADAA, 2014). It can range in severity to a discomfort which can be circumvented and adapted to, to a virtually disabling fear with infiltration into multiple areas of life (American Psychiatric

Association, 2013). According to the DSM-5, the median age of onset of social anxiety disorder in the US is age 13, with 75% of those with social anxiety disorder experiencing the onset at a range of ages 8-15. The beginning of anxiety can manifest either gradually and subtly or suddenly, induced by a particular event (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Fear of negative evaluation can be defined as evaluations, distress over their negative evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectations that others would evaluate oneself negatively” (Watson & Friend, 1969). Numerous social psychological phenomena, such as conformity, prosocial behavior, self-presentation, self-serving attributions, social anxiety, self-handicapping, attitude change, compliance, and social facilitation have been linked to people's worries about receiving a negative evaluation from others (Schlenker, 1980).

Fear is a powerful and considerably negative facets such as affective (fear in social human emotion. It involves a mild to severe situations) or behavioral (social avoidance) feelings of apprehension about some of social anxiety were uniquely related to perceived threat. Multiple sorts of biases in the processing of social information promote negative beliefs and self-evaluations (Hirsch and Clark, 2004). Specifically, individuals with social anxiety tend to excessively scrutinize their own behavior (Clark and Wells, 1995) and demonstrate an increased focus on threatening social cues (Heimberg et al., 2010; Asmundson and Stein, 1994; Hope et al., 1990). Additionally, socially anxious people frequently impute good social feedback to sources other than their own abilities (Beard and Amir 2009; Hirsch and Clark 2004); Wallace and Alden 1995. Additionally, recent research reveals that people with social anxiety react with terror to both positive and negative appraisal (Weeks et al. 2010). As a result, people who are socially anxious have shown biases at many cognitive levels, such as attention, interpretation, and thought content, all of which help to keep social anxiety in check. The apprehension of negative evaluation (FNE) is widely recognized as a key aspect of social anxiety. According to cognitive theories, this fear may arise due to biased information processing, particularly when anticipating a distressing event (Clark and McManus, 2002). Individuals with social anxiety tend to engage in maladaptive appraisal of social situations, involving the selective recall of negative information about themselves (Rapee and Heimberg, 1997). Those experiencing fear of negative evaluation may perceive a lack of social approval. Leary (1983) discovered that individuals with high levels of fear of negative evaluation often experience increased anxiety and actively avoid interpersonal interactions. In social evaluative situations, the fear of negative evaluation exhibits a more robust association with social anxiety compared to other anxieties such as test anxiety or speaking anxiety (Howe, 2014).

In most cognitive models it is postulated that individuals with social anxiety display a variety of information processing biases (e.g., negative self-referential biases, increased self-focused attention) that generate feelings of anxiety. This anxiety

and the self's negative appraisal contribute to the perpetuation of social anxiety through a sequence of detrimental cycles (Clark and McManus, 2002; Morrison and Heimberg, 2013).

In 2008, Wayne Stephan, Amber Stephan, and Rosealee Palmer conducted a correlational study involving 786 undergraduate students. Their findings revealed a direct and positive relationship between the fear of negative evaluation and perfectionism, with the fear of negative evaluation demonstrating a stronger correlation with the unhealthy form of perfectionism. The fear of negative evaluation hinders individuals' efforts to engage with others, potentially disrupting appropriate social interactions and heightening experiences of loneliness (Jackson et al., 2002). Empirical studies have substantiated these claims, indicating a significant association between the fear of negative evaluation and loneliness in both adolescent and undergraduate samples (Jackson, 2007).

Objectives

The following objectives have been formulated on the basis of above mentioned review of literature. The objective of the present study is;

To study the relationship between the social anxiety and fear of negative evaluation among young adults.

To determine whether there is a meaningful and statistically significant difference between social anxiety and fear of negative evaluation.

Hypotheses

1. There is a significant relationship between social anxiety and fear of negative evaluation among young adults.
2. There is no significant difference between mean scores of social anxiety and fear of negative evaluation among young adults.

METHODOLOGY

Sample:

The study sample comprised of 160 participants in the age group of 18-25 years. Participants were undergraduate and postgraduate college students collected by simple random sampling technique. All the selected participants have been given related instructions mentioned in the respective

manual. They were also assured about the confidentiality of the results obtained for the present study. Rapport building was established with all the participants.

TOOLS

The Social Phobia Inventory (abbreviated as SPIN) (Connor et al., 2000) is a 17-item questionnaire for screening and measuring severity of Social Anxiety Disorder (Social Phobia – SP). Each of the 17 items is rated on a scale from 0 to 4: not at all, a little bit, somewhat, very much, and extremely; with higher scores corresponding to greater distress. The full-scale score thus ranges

from 0 to 68, with higher scores reflecting greater social phobia symptomatology. Three subscales evaluate fear (e.g., fear of being embarrassed), Avoidance (e.g., avoidance of going to parties), and physiological (e.g., blushing) symptoms associated with social phobia. A cutoff value of 19 was found to distinguish between adults with and without social anxiety disorder. Psychometric properties for the SPIN include good test-retest reliability over a 2-week period (rs.78 - .89) and internal consistency (Cronbach’s .82 - .94) with an adult population.

Severity	None or very mild	Mild	Moderate	Severe	Very severe
Score	Less than 20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51 or more

■ **The Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation (BFNE; Leary, 1983)**

which is a self-report scale composed of 12 items describing fearful or worrying cognition. On a Likert Scale ranging from 1 ("Not at all") to 5 ("Extremely") the respondents indicate the extent to which each item describes them.

Eight of the twelve items describe the presence of fear or worrying (straightforwardly worded, or

positively scored items), while the remaining four items describe the absence of fear or worrying (reversely scored items). The reversed scored items were 2, 4,7,10.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Mean, S D, Pearson product Moment Correlation, t-ratio will be calculated to study the relationship and difference between Social Anxiety and Fear of negative evaluation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table-I: showing relationship between fear of negative evaluation (F N E) and social phobia (S P) among young adults

Variables	F N E	S P
F N E		0.27**
SP		

**significant at 0.05 level

The tabulated value (Table-I) pertaining to Fear of negative evaluation and social phobia among young adults reflected r-value 0.27 which is significant at 0.05 level. It revealed the linear correlation between the selected variables i.e. both the variables correlated significantly. In 2015, a study was conducted at VIT University-Chennai involving 64 students enrolled in various engineering branches. The participants comprised both hostel residents and day scholars. Out of the 64 students, 33 were female and 31 were male, selected through a simple random sampling method, and the study employed a survey research design. The research utilized Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE; Watson & Friend, 1969) and State Trait Anxiety

Inventory (STAI; Spielberger, Gorsuch, Lushene, Vagg & Jacobs, 1983) as assessment tools. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation between anxiety and the fear of negative evaluation. In simpler terms, the fear of negativism and State Trait Anxiety exhibited a highly positive correlation (Kumar et al., 2015). Another study proposed anxiety as a potent motivator in social situations, prompting individuals to avoid anxiety-provoking circumstances (Watson and Nesdaie, 2012). Consequently, people tend to withdraw socially when feeling anxious, either in anticipation or during the experience, potentially leading to a sense of loneliness due to the unmet need for belongingness (Liao et al., 2014).

Table-II: Difference between fear of negative evaluation and social phobia among young adults

	Mea n	S D	Df	t-value	P-value
Social Phobia	27.53	11.40	158	2.13**	0.0366
Fear of Negative Evaluation	28.47	7.06			

**Significant at .05 level.

The obtained mean value of social phobia is 27.53 whereas the mean value of fear of negative evaluation is 28.47. It is depicted

that on the basis of the mentioned mean values, that there is a significant difference between both the variables. The tabulated t-value

(Table-II) is 2.13 which is significant at 0.05 level. Thus, the hypothesis has been rejected. It suggests that these two constructs; social anxiety and fear of negative evaluation are distinct and not simply different expressions of the same underlying phenomena. In other words, they likely measure separate aspects of social experiences or psychological states. It suggests that scores on social anxiety and fear of negative evaluation are not just due to random variation. For instance, individuals with high social anxiety may not necessarily have equally high levels of fear of negative evaluation, and vice versa. It also implies that interventions or treatment targeting social anxiety may need to address different factors than those targeting fear of negative evaluation, as they represent distinct psychological experiences.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the conducted research affirms the hypothesis that a substantial relationship exists between social anxiety and the fear of negative evaluation among young

adults. The identified correlation underscores the intricate interplay between these psychological factors, indicating that heightened concerns about negative evaluation contribute significantly to the manifestation of social anxiety in this demographic. These findings hold implications for tailored interventions, emphasizing the importance of addressing fears associated with negative evaluation to alleviate social anxiety among young adults. As we delve deeper into understanding and mitigating these concerns, this research lays a foundation for targeted strategies that aim to enhance the overall well-being of young adults grappling with social anxiety.

Also, the hypothesis proposing no significant difference between mean scores of social anxiety and fear of negative evaluation among young adults has been unexpectedly rejected. This outcome prompts a closer examination of the intricate factors influencing variations within this demographic. Further exploration is warranted to discern the nuanced dynamics contributing to these distinctions, providing valuable insights for future investigations into the complex relationship between social anxiety

and the fear of negative evaluation among young adults.

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