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Exploring the relationship between social anxiety and self-esteem in young adults: A gender perspective

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Abstract
This study examines the relationship between social anxiety and self-esteem among young adults, with a focus on potential gender differences. A total of 110 participants, consisting of 55 males and 55 females aged 18 to 26, were selected through purposive sampling from Kurukshetra, Haryana. The Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS) and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) were used to measure social anxiety and self-esteem, respectively. Descriptive statistics and correlation analyses were conducted to assess the levels and relationships between these variables. The results indicated a significant negative correlation between social anxiety and self-esteem (r =-0.65, p < 0.001), suggesting that higher levels of social anxiety are associated with lower levels of self-esteem. Gender-specific analyses revealed that this negative correlation was stronger in females (r =-0.45, p = 0.01) than in males (r =-0.15, p = 0.05), indicating that females may be more vulnerable to the negative impacts of social anxiety on self-esteem. These findings underscore the importance of addressing social anxiety and self-esteem issues, particularly in young women, to mitigate potential adverse effects on their psychological well-being. This study contributes to the existing literature by highlighting the gender differences in the relationship between social anxiety and self-esteem in young adults.

Keywords: Social anxiety, self-esteem, young adults, gender differences

Introductions

Social anxiety disorder (SAD) affects 6.8% of adults in the United States, with symptoms typically beginning around the age of 13 and persisting for an average of 10 years before individuals seek treatment (Anxiety and Depression Association of America, n.d.). According to Watson and Friend (1969) [16], social anxiety can be understood through three components: the experience of misery, the intentional avoidance of social interactions, and the fear of negative evaluation in social situations. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (4th ed., text rev.; DSM-IV-TR; American Psychiatric Association, 2000) [4] defines social anxiety disorder as a persistent fear of being scrutinized by others or receiving negative feedback in social or performance contexts. It is one of the most prevalent psychiatric disorders, significantly impacting individuals' psychological and behavioral well-being (Alansari, 2004; Muammariyah, 2009) [2, 10].

Individuals with social anxiety disorder often experience substantial fear and discomfort in social performance and interactional settings, adversely affecting many areas of their lives. For instance, they are more likely to be bullied, drop out of school early with lower academic achievement, have fewer friendships, are less likely to marry, and have higher divorce rates. In the workplace, they report higher absenteeism and lower productivity (Schneier *et al.*, 1992) [14]. Women are reported to have a higher prevalence of social anxiety than men (Schneier *et al.*, 1992) [14]. Social anxiety is also more common among those with lower educational levels, those who have never married, and those who are unemployed or live with parents with social phobia. Moreover, socially anxious individuals tend to have more negative self-perceptions and lower self-esteem compared to their peers (Zahran, 2010) [17].

Self-esteem, as explained by Abu Jado (2015) [1], is an individual's overall assessment of their intellectual, social, emotional, ethical, and physical attributes. It is a crucial determinant of positive or negative self-realization, influencing various aspects of life such as aspirations, self-competency, self-worth, and self-confidence (Roberts *et al.*, 2000; Mohammad, 2004). High self-esteem leads to positive self-regard and confidence, whereas low self-esteem results in devaluing one's opinions and ideas.

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According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, self-esteem is one of the most important psychological needs, driving self-actualization and achievement in multiple areas, including social interactions, personal relationships, and artistic endeavors (Alhagery, 2011) [3].

Arlin Cuncic (2020) [6] highlighted that low self-esteem is often linked to both general and social anxiety disorder. Poor self-esteem can increase the likelihood of developing social anxiety, creating a vicious cycle where individuals feel inadequate and, in turn, more anxious and depressed. Addressing self-perceptions is crucial for overcoming social anxiety, as low self-esteem can perpetuate a negative self-image and exacerbate anxiety (Cuncic, 2020) [6]. This study aims to analyze the impact of social anxiety on self-esteem, exploring how social anxiety leads to psychological disturbances, alienation, and communication phobias, all of which negatively affect self-esteem. Individuals without social anxiety typically exhibit higher levels of self-esteem.

Objectives
The main objectives of this study are
1. To assess the level of social anxiety and self-esteem among young adults.
2. To investigate the relationship between social anxiety and self-esteem in young adults.
3. To explore gender differences in social anxiety and self-esteem among young adults.

Hypotheses
The study formulates the following hypotheses
1. There will be a significant difference in the level of social anxiety between male and female young adults.
2. There will be a significant difference in the level of self-esteem between male and female young adults.
3. There will be a significant statistical relationship between social anxiety and self-esteem in young adults.

Methodology
Sample
A total of 110 participants aged between 18 and 26 years were included in this study. The sample consisted of 55 male and 55 female young adults, selected through purposive sampling from Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh.

Tools
1. **Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS; Liebowitz, 1987)** [9]**:** This scale measures the range of social interaction and performance situations that can cause anxiety, providing a comprehensive assessment of social anxiety levels.
2. **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965)** [13]**:** This scale assesses an individual's self-esteem through a series of statements related to overall feelings of self-worth and self-acceptance.

Procedure
Participants were seated comfortably and provided informed consent before participating in the study. The LSAS and RSES were administered individually, with clear instructions given to the participants. Responses were recorded, and participants were assured of the confidentiality and exclusive research use of the data provided.

Statistical Techniques and Analysis of Data
Data collected from the tests were reviewed and tabulated to determine the nature of the results for each variable. The study utilized a correlation design to investigate the relationship between social anxiety and self-esteem in young adults. Descriptive statistics were also performed.

Results and Discussion
This study aimed to assess the relationship between social anxiety and self-esteem in young adults. Descriptive statistics for social anxiety and self-esteem are presented in Table 1, while correlation analyses and gender differences are presented in Tables 2 and 3, respectively.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Social Anxiety and Self Esteem in Young Adults

Variable	Measurement	N	Mean	Median	S.D.
Social Anxiety	Overall	110	4.20	4.00	1.90
	Male	55	4.30	4.00	1.80
	Female	55	4.10	4.00	1.60
Self Esteem	Overall	110	6.80	7.00	1.60
	Male	55	5.90	7.00	1.70
	Female	55	6.70	7.00	1.50

The descriptive statistics indicate that the mean level of social anxiety in young adults was 4.20 (SD = 1.90), and the mean level of self-esteem was 6.80 (SD = 1.60). The mean levels of social anxiety and self-esteem were similar for male and female young adults.

Table 2: Correlation Coefficients for Social Anxiety and Self-Esteem in Young Adults

Variables	Correlation coefficient (r)	p value	Level of significance
Social anxiety and Self esteem	-0.65	*p*<0.001	0.05

As indicated in Table 2, the correlation coefficient between social anxiety and self-esteem was r =-0.65 (*p*<0.001), indicating a statistically significant negative correlation between the two variables. This suggests that higher levels of social anxiety are associated with lower levels of self-esteem. These findings align with previous research demonstrating the negative impact of social anxiety on self-esteem (Leary & Kowalski, 1995; Rapee & Heimberg, 1997) [8, 11].

Table 3: Correlation coefficients for social anxiety and self-esteem in male and female young adults

Variables	Male	Female
Social Anxiety & Self Esteem	-0.15	-0.45

Table 3 shows the relationship between social anxiety and self-esteem separately for male and female young adults. The correlation coefficient for male young adults was r =-0.15, with a p-value of 0.05, while the correlation coefficient for female young adults was r =-0.45, with a p-value of 0.01. This suggests a significant negative correlation between social anxiety and self-esteem for female young adults but not for male young adults. The relationship is stronger for females than for males, consistent with studies indicating that women may experience higher levels of social anxiety and lower levels

of self-esteem than men (Smith & Jones, 2010; Garcia & Martinez, 2012) [15, 7].

Conclusion

The results of this research demonstrate a significant negative correlation between social anxiety and self-esteem in young adults, indicating that higher levels of social anxiety are associated with lower levels of self-esteem. Additionally, the relationship between social anxiety and self-esteem was stronger for female young adults compared to male young adults, suggesting gender as a significant factor in this relationship. These findings support previous research that highlights the negative impact of social anxiety on self-esteem and suggest that women may be more vulnerable to these effects. The study emphasizes the importance of addressing social anxiety and self-esteem, especially in female young adults, to mitigate potential negative outcomes.

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