

Self-Esteem of Socially Anxious and Non- Anxious University Students

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The purpose of the present study was to investigate the Self-esteem of socially anxious university students. A total sample of 500 students comprising of 250 males and 250 females ranging between 17-25 years in age, with the educational background of 1st year to M.Sc final year were selected from different universities. Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale and the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale were used to assess social anxiety disorder and the self-esteem of students. It was hypothesized that Social anxiety will be greater among female students as compared to male students. Additionally it was assumed that the self-esteem of socially anxious students would be low as compared to non-anxious students. The results were computed using t-test, chi- square, and all hypotheses were supported by the results. The findings of this research indicated that female students scored high on Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale as compared to male students. Socially anxious students scored low on the Rosenberg self-esteem scale as compared to non-anxious students. The limitations and recommendations of the study are mentioned in the last section.

Keywords: Self-esteem, social anxiety disorder, university students

Gordon Allport (1966) was the most influential of the trait theorists. In his view, personality is made up of “traits, the guideposts for action, and the source of the uniqueness of the individual”. Traits are defined as secondary predilections that shape the person’s behavior in reliable and individualized ways. The consistency in behavior is due to traits as traits are long lasting attributes and are normally general or broad in their scope.

Traits form the structure of personality which, in turn, determines an individual’s behavior. Allport (1966) was the one who discovered distinctive traits which make all people separate entities.

Maslow (1970) presented that there are two levels of esteem needs which are reputation and self-esteem. Reputation is defined as the image of the person in the others’ eyes, and his fame and recognition. On the other hand, self-esteem refers to an individual’s feelings about himself including the level of confidence and self-worth. Self-esteem is more than prestige and reputation. It is about the desire of strength, for attainment, for competence, for mastery and capability for self-assurance in the face of the world, and for the freedom and independence. So it can be said that self-esteem is about the real competence and not just the views of others. When the self-esteem needs of a person are fulfilled, he starts realizing the need for self-actualization which is the highest level of needs presented by Maslow (Feist & Feist, 2002).

Wilson and Rapee (2006) reported two studies which were aimed at studying the beliefs about self-attributes in social anxiety and the level of certainty with which these beliefs are held. The findings of both studies suggested that socially anxious persons had more negative feelings about their personality as compared to non-anxious people. Moreover, the people with social anxiety had less confidence in themselves.

Shepherd and Edelman (2009) investigated the relationship between social anxiety and the other variables including locus of control, depression, ego strength, self-esteem, anxiety and the ways to cope in a sample chosen from university students. Social anxiety was seen to be high in people with more depression and anxiety, external locus of control, low ego strength, lower self-esteem and emotional coping instead of issue oriented coping.

These results are coherent and not projective of causation. They can raise a lot of problems with regards to the theory, anticipation, interference and stimulating mental health issues among university students.

The social anxiety disorder brings out the worst impression on personality traits such as shyness, introversion, and self-esteem. Students who have the problem of social anxiety disorder are isolated, under estimate themselves and consider their entity as worthless avoiding gatherings and public interactions and taking part actively in the routine life activities as compared to non-anxious students.

Lzagic, Akyuz, Dogan and Kugu (2004) found that the people suffering from social anxiety had low self-esteem as compared to those who were normal. Students with social anxiety have a more distorted body image than those without Social anxiety.

Shepherd and Edelman (2009) studied the effects of anxiety, depression, locus of control, self-esteem, ego strength on ways of coping with situations. A sample of university students was used for this purpose. Those who had high levels of social anxiety were more anxious, depressed, had low ego strength, low self-esteem, external locus of control and would cope with problems in an emotional way rather than focusing on the problem. The results were not predictive of causality and they created certain issues in relation to the theory, anticipation, involvement and endorsing mental health within a university setting.

De Jong (2002) conducted a research to study the importance of self-image on social anxiety. The sample of the study included 19 high and 19 low socially anxious females. As self-esteem is subtly relevant to self-presentation and impression management strategies, an

implicit association test (IAT) was used to assess the participants' self-esteem as well as their general evaluation of others (other esteem). The women with social anxiety had low self-esteem on the self-report measure though the positive self-image of both low and high anxious women was the same.

Dell'Osso, Salettoni, Papasogli, Rucci, Ciapparelli, Bandettini and Poggio (2002) investigated social anxiety symptoms in both genders across the social anxiety spectrum and the relationship with other psychopathological features. The sample chosen consisted of 250 students. The two questionnaires used to gather data were: The Social Anxiety Spectrum Self report (SHY-SR), which evaluates the social anxiety spectrum, and the general spectrum measure (GSM), which analyses features of panic, agoraphobia, temper, obsessive-compulsive, and eating behaviors. The mean total score for SHY-SR was higher in female students as compared to that of male students and gender differences were mainly marked for the interpersonal sensitivity field. Similarly, the scores on the general spectrum measure were higher for female students as compared to male students excluding the manic section. These findings suggest that more symptoms were seen in female students as compared to male students and the social anxiety spectrum profile of both genders was different quantitatively but it was the same qualitatively.

According to Shah and Kataria (2010), 19.5% of the respondents comprising a sample of 380 under graduate university students had varied degrees of the social anxiety disorder. Social anxiety was found to affect the performance at work, social life, as well as family life. Besides, social anxiety seems to have significantly affected their quality of life. The most commonly occurring fear was performing in front of people. These students also reported several clinical manifestations that had affected their educational, social and interpersonal life.

Social anxiety disorder is the 3rd psychiatric disorder. This disorder has been observed to be comparatively high in female students as compared to male students in our culture. Personality traits are influenced by the social anxiety disorder such as shyness, introversion and self-esteem; social anxiety disorder brings out the worst in such personality traits.

Social anxiety disorder is one of the common psychological disorders. This disorder has been observed as comparatively higher in female students as compared to male students in our culture. Personality traits are influenced by social anxiety problems such as shyness, introversion, and self-esteem. "Adolescence is a time when many young people leave familiar settings to live at college and university". They get a chance to develop social relationships and also need to perform in front of others like meeting new people, writing and giving presentations in front of others, having group discussions, dating and exam anxiety. For many students, these situations are a source of excitement and for those who are socially anxious, these situations are frightening. The concept of social anxiety disorder varies from culture to culture depending on social demands. The present study is therefore conducted to identify social anxiety disorder among students and accordingly self-esteem of socially anxious students.

In Pakistan there seems to be a dearth of research on this topic. Keeping in view this factor, this research work aims to find out the "prevalence rate of social anxiety disorder among college and university students and to investigate its psychological impact on personality".

Hypotheses

1. Social anxiety will be high among female students as compared to male students.
2. Socially anxious students will score low on the self-esteem scale as compared to non-anxious students.

Method

Participants

A sample comprising of 500 students ranging in age from 17 to 25 years including an equal number of male (n=250) and female (n=250) from Masters program (1st to final year) were randomly selected from various colleges and universities of Peshawar, Swabi and Nowshera.

Measures

In-Depth Clinical Interview. An in depth clinical interview was conducted for each student in order to gather relevant information regarding personal information, educational background, nature of problems they face, frequency and duration of the problem experience, and information regarding any psychopathology.

Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (1987). The Liebowitz social anxiety scale was developed by Michael Liebowitz in order to evaluate the patients suffering from social anxiety disorder in terms of their performance in society as well as social interaction with other people. This scale consists of 24 items which show the possible range of the social anxiety severity rating. There are four subscales which provide the following scores: performance fears, performance avoidance, social fear and, social avoidance. The Liebowitz social anxiety scale is valid, reliable and a treatment sensitive measure for social anxiety disorder. The alpha reliability of Liebowitz social anxiety scale is (.90 to .97) (Liebowitz, 1987).

Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (1965). The Rosenberg self-esteem scale consists of 10 items. It is a self-report measure of global self-esteem, self-worth or self-acceptance. This scale is considered to be a reliable and valid scale as it showed its worth when applied to different sample groups. This scale is equally beneficial for all population samples including males, females, adolescents, adults and the elderly. The alpha reliability value of this scale is 0.85 (Rosenberg, 1965).

Procedure

Permission was taken from different colleges and universities of Peshawar, Nowshera and Swabi. 500 students including 250 male and 250 females were selected as a sample. The age range of the respondents were from 17 to 25 years and their selection was random (lottery method). They were from class (1st year till M. Sc final year). Rapport was developed with students and they were asked to fill consent forms in order to ensure their willingness to participate in the process.

After getting informed consent, interviews were conducted in order to gather personal information, educational background, nature of problems they face, frequency and duration of the problem and information regarding any psychopathology. In the next step, Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale was administered on them. Students, who scored from 55 to 80, were further assessed with the symptom checklist of social anxiety disorder derived from DSM IV (1994) in order to screen them for social anxiety disorder. Those students who scored less than 55 were excluded and those who scored greater than 55 were included for further investigation.

In the second phase, the impact of social anxiety disorder on Self-esteem was investigated through Rosenberg Self esteem Scale. The students were informed about the confidentiality about their scores.

In the third phase of the study Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale was administered on non-anxious students in an individual setting to know about their level of self-esteem.

Results

The purpose of this research was to study the levels of Self-esteem of socially anxious and non-anxious university students. The researcher empirically examined the relationship of social anxiety disorder with self-esteem. The results are presented in the following tables:

Table 1
Gender Distribution of Non Anxious and Anxious Students (N=500)

	Non Anxious (n= 212)	Anxious (n= 288)	Total
Male	125 (50%)	125 (50%)	250
Female	87 (34.8%)	163 (65.2%)	250

$$\chi^2_{(1)} = 11.825; * p < .01$$

Table 1 shows the frequency of male and female students comprising anxious and non-anxious groups. Our data shows that female students are more anxious than male students as 65.2% female students reported anxiety whereas only 50% male students were classified as anxious. Chi-square value shows that the gender difference frequency is statistically significant at $p < .01$.

Table 2
Mean Difference and t-value of Anxious and Non Anxious Students on Self-Esteem Scale (N=500)

Group	n	M	SD	t-value
Non – Anxious	211	14.91	4.12	
Anxious	287	10.03	2.83	15.64***

*** $p < .001$; $df = 496$

Table 2 shows the mean difference between anxious and non-anxious students on the self-esteem scale. The figure shows that the self-esteem of anxious students is low as compared to non-anxious students.

Discussion

The present study examined the self-esteem of socially anxious university students. The overall results indicate a significant difference between socially anxious male and female students', vis-a-vis their levels of self-esteem. These findings supported our first hypothesis, that is, female students seem to be higher on Liebotwitz social anxiety as compared to male students (Table 1).

In this study, we found that out of 250 male students 50 percent were anxious while out of 250 female students 65.2 percent were found to be anxious which clearly shows that the number of female students suffering from social anxiety is higher. Conrad and Petermann (1999) also reported similar findings. He showed that there were more females who were diagnosed with social anxiety disorder and the severity of their disorder kept on increasing with age. The strength of social fear was higher among females as compared to social anxiety. Social anxiety is also found among patients with depressive, somatoform, and substance use disorders. According to the present findings it has been found that generalized social anxiety disorder which is a subtype of social anxiety disorder is more among female students.

These findings are in line with past researches. A review of the existing literature shows that there is a positive correlation between DSM IV (1994) diagnosable social anxiety among adolescents and adults and that the occurrence of lifetime social anxiety in females is higher than males. In females the percentage is 9.5 whereas in males it is 4.9 percent. The patients of social anxiety report an early onset, more persistent signs and symptoms, more severe damages, more co-morbidity, higher cure rates and indicated that their parents were suffering from the same disorder as compared to those of non-generalized social anxiety (Wittchen, Stein & Kessler, 1999).

Stein and Kean (2000) studied how the social anxiety affects the lifestyle, the functioning of life, and the person's level of satisfaction. They also suggested that depression is a very common condition seen in the people suffering from social anxiety. They studied all the factors mentioned in accordance with the age, sex and social status and class. They presented that females were more likely to suffer from social anxiety and it was also noticed that level of social anxiety was significantly higher among the age group of 15 to 24 years.

Keeping in view the above mentioned facts, there are certain factors and reasons which cause social anxiety disorder in females as compared to those of males. In our culture, males are dominating and they receive special care and attention from the parents. They are preferred in families and on the other hand, females do not receive such attention. This is the major factor which affects the personality and psychology of females. This leads to social anxiety disorder and as a result, females remain unable to show their abilities and even feel uncomfortable in social gatherings. Similarly there is another major issue in our society is that, when the female students leave for universities they have to face obstacles in the form of pressure from families, male dominant society factors, lack of due respect, because of these factors female are very conscious regarding their image and that any mishap in the college or university may create a bad name for them. All these factors play an important role in the growth of social anxiety disorder among female students.

The results of this research work are in accordance with the second hypothesis that "socially anxious students score low on self-esteem scale as compared to non-anxious students" (Table 2). The results show that the relationship between social anxiety disorder and personality correlates is consistent. Findings indicate that the level of self-esteem is low among socially anxious students. Previous studies showed the same finding as Wilson and Rapee (2006) who conducted two studies which were aimed at studying the beliefs about self-attributes in social anxiety and the level of certainty with which these beliefs are held. The findings of both the studies suggested that socially anxious people had more negative feelings about their personality as compared to non-anxious people. Moreover, people with social anxiety had less confidence in themselves. Shepherd and Edelman (2009) investigated the relationship between social anxiety and other variables including locus of control, depression, ego strength, self-esteem, anxiety and the ways to cope in a sample chosen from university students. Social anxiety was seen to be higher in people with more depression and anxiety, external locus of control, low ego strength, lower self-esteem and emotion coping

instead of issue oriented coping. These results are coherent and not projective of causation. They can raise a lot of problems with regards to theory, anticipation, interference and stimulating mental health issues among the university students.

In the light of the aforesaid study and the analysis and review of earlier studies, it can be concluded that social anxiety disorder brings out the worst in personality traits such as shyness, introversion, and self-esteem. Students who have the problem of social anxiety disorder are isolated, underestimate themselves, consider their entity as worthless and avoid gathering, public interaction as well as cannot take part actively in the activities of routine life as compared to non-anxious students.

Conclusion

Social anxiety seems higher among female students. The results of the present study also revealed that social anxiety disorder affect personality traits such as self-esteem. Thus the results of the present study and the feedback of the students supported the assumptions that social anxiety will be high among female students as compared to male students. Furthermore, socially anxious students scored lower on the self-esteem scale as compared to non-anxious students.

Limitations of the Current Study

The first limitation is that this research only focused on the student population; however any person can be affected by the Social anxiety disorder. While choosing the sample, the socio economic status of the respondents was not considered. Another major limitation of this study is that data were collected from only one province i.e., Khyber Pakhtunkhwa while the other three provinces were ignored. In keeping with cultural differences, other provinces may show different findings.

Recommendations

This research work has a scope for future research related to the topic and this can be expanded to explore certain other issues which are related to the given variables but have not been covered here. The sample used in this research comprised only of university students while the same research can be done on any other population sample. This has its benefits in that, the sample of the people from different age groups can be studied and then a comparison can be made. Moreover, people from different geographic areas can be selected and then their results can be compared. This will help to examine the anxiety level of people in different parts of the country in relation to the possible reasons behind them. This will enhance the knowledge in this particular area of research.

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