

## SOCIAL ANXIETY IN ADOLESCENTS: DOES SELF ESTEEM MATTER ?

Zaeema Riaz Ahmad<sup>1</sup>, Nasreen Bano<sup>2</sup>, Riaz Ahmad<sup>3</sup>, Sarwat Jahan Khanam<sup>4</sup>

Institute of Clinical Psychology, University of Karachi,  
PAKISTAN.

<sup>3</sup> [dr\\_riazpsy@hotmail.com](mailto:dr_riazpsy@hotmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

*The objective of the present study is to investigate the significance of Self esteem in producing Social Anxiety in adolescent students. For this purpose 210 adolescent students (124 females and 86 males) between the age range of 16 years to 19 years were randomly selected from all three socio-economic status i.e. low, middle and high. Demographic information form was filled and the level of self esteem and social anxiety of participants were measured through use of Rosenberg Self esteem Scale and Interaction Anxiousness Scale. Pearson Product Correlation coefficient, partial correlation and linear regression were used. Results show that negative correlation ( $r = -.418, p < 0.001$ ) was found between self-esteem and social anxiety. Same trends between these two variables ( $r = -.417, p < 0.001$ ) were also found after controlling the effects of gender, age and monthly income of family. For further explanations regression analysis also yields significant results reflecting self-esteem as the factor involved in development of social anxiety [ $R^2 = .175, F(1, 208) = 44.149, p < .001$ ] in adolescents.*

**Keywords:** Self esteem, Social Anxiety, students, adolescents

### INTRODUCTION

According to Schenkar and Leary (1982) anxiety in social situation appears as an individual perceives or expects one's evaluation and has an uncertainty regarding satisfactory evaluation from others. Doubts for getting favorable impression in real or imagined social-evaluation situations produce such anxieties which result in feelings of apprehension and self consciousness or distress. Social anxiety occurs when one believes that perception of others about them is different from their perception about themselves (Loudin, Loukas & Robinson, 2003). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-IV-TR (APA, 2000) defines social anxiety disorder as a constant state of fear to be exposed to unknown people or evaluation from others in social or performance situations. Due to person's fear of being involved in a situation resulting in embarrassment, he or she starts to avoid these feared situations or is suffering with severe anxiety and distress. All these (avoidance, intense anxiety or distress in the feared social or performance situations) significantly interferes in all domains of his or her functioning.

Adolescence marks the period of highest risk for onset of social anxiety (Wittchen et al., 1999). Social anxiety in adolescents seems an important issue that draw researchers' attention since it is related to numerous problems, especially to impaired social functioning and negative self-perceptions. Socially anxious adolescents may experience troubles in peer relationships (La Greca & Lopez, 1998; Vemberg, Abwender, Ewell, & Beery, 1992) and inhibition in developing public individuation. The physiological and mental distinctiveness of adolescents and the nature of environmental or social tasks which they are assumed to achieve often cause additional stress and adjustment problems.

The final stage of adolescence i.e. late Adolescence is the phase of transition to adulthood and school to college. During this period physiological changes along with the psychological

and emotional development occur. At this stage first exposure with world or society is being started with out adult supervision and he or she focuses on developing new relationships of his/her priorities. The importance of peer orientation and affiliation reach their peak during this period (Eccles, Lord, & Midgely, 1991) and peer relationships also help adolescents to facilitate their sense of personal identity and raise their autonomy (Dusek, 1991 & Ingersoll, 1989).

Decision regarding career, popularity among peer group or in play ground and need for social approval are the focus of the people of this particular age. Keeping in view the abovementioned evidences, the current study is an endeavor to uncover the determinant (i.e. self esteem) of social anxiety among adolescents in Pakistan.

A large number of studies conducted in various cultures and populations supported the significance of self-esteem in adolescence (e.g. Deihl, Vicary, and Deike, 1997). Adolescents, who have high self-esteem, always handle their stress and frustration in more appropriate ways. Because late adolescence is a phase where there is a pressure to start independent social life and the number of environmental and social challenges occurs during this period, therefore, self-esteem helps individuals cope with these changes and to protect their mental health. In spite of other factors self-esteem is directly related to personal well-being. Killeen (1993) has also established the association of low self-esteem with both mental illness and physical illness.

Consequences of low self-esteem have been established as previous studies describe low self esteem as a key factor in the development of various psychopathologies contributing to poor interpersonal relationships, and lack of confidence in social situations. Coppersmith (1967) and Ginsberg, et al. (1998) also stated the negative link between social anxiety and self-esteem. The evidences suggest that both self-evaluation and impairment in social interaction are the keen issues for youngsters entering in early adulthood and adapting new social roles and challenges. Therefore this study stresses the significance of self-esteem as a protective factor in the development of psychopathology i.e. social anxiety, among adolescents of age between 16-19 years.

## **RESEARCH AIM**

The present study is an attempt to enquire the association of self-esteem with social anxiety in Pakistani adolescent students between ages of 16yrs-19 yrs. Although a large number of researches in western countries focus and explain the relationship between social anxiety and self esteem in adolescents, there is dearth of research in this area even though Pakistani adolescents in general face the problems of anxiety especially due to lack of confidence and low self esteem. Due to these factors, students may become anxious in social interactions, public speaking and performance in front of audience. This study would contribute to the findings of researches exploring the factors associated with mental disorders, thus providing basis to develop prevention strategies and predict future trends.

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

For the purpose of present study, a sample of 210 adolescents from low, middle and high socioeconomic classes was selected. Over all sample included 86 males and 124 females. The age ranges from 16 to 19 years with the mean age of 17.24 years. The population of adolescents in the schools/ colleges of Karachi is grouped into two educational types (private

& Government). Only adolescents from registered schools /colleges of the Ministry of Education, Sindh were taken.

The sample for the study was selected on the basis of following predetermined criteria.

- a. Enrolled students between 16 to 19 years in the two educational systems (namely Government & Private) were included.
- b. Those students whose period of stay in same educational organization was at least 01 year were included.
- c. Children of divorced or separated parents were excluded
- d. Physically disabled adolescents were also excluded

## Measures

### *Interaction Anxiousness Scale*

Interaction Anxiousness Scale (IAS; Leary 1983) is a self-report measure of dispositional social anxiety. The scale defines social anxiety as experiential state of anxiety resulted from being evaluated in a social situation. The IAS demonstrates high test-retest and internal reliability.

### *Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale*

This scale assesses the global self-esteem. It consists of 10 items answered on a five-point Likert scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. High scores on the scale indicate high self-esteem. In the current study the Urdu version of Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (Sardar, 1998) was used. The Cronbach for the translated version of RSES in the current study is 0.738.

## Procedure

Sample of the research was randomly recruited from different educational organizations of Karachi, Pakistan. After getting permission from authorities participants were approached in their classes through their class teachers. Initially personal information was which was filled by the examiner individually.

Participants from low, middle and high socioeconomic status were taken. Socioeconomic status of the participants was determined on the basis of criteria given by the Federal Bureau of Statistic, Pakistan in 2001 on the basis of house hold income and expenditures survey (cited in Ahmad & Khanam, 2005). According to this survey in Pakistan Low socio economic status has a monthly income of Rs 14000 and below, middle socio economic status has income of 14000 to 30000 and the high socio economic status has the income 30000 and above.

Then Rosenberg self-esteem scale and Interaction Anxiousness scale were administered to measure the level of self esteem and social anxiety in participants respectively. Both scales were administered in group setting. In the end participation of the study were acknowledged and highly appreciated.

## Scoring and Statistical analysis

After collection of the data, the answer sheets were scored according to the standard procedures. In order to interpret the data in statistical terminology Regression analysis, as well as Pearson product moment correlation coefficient and partial correlations were used.

## RESULTS

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Demographic variables**

<i>Variables</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%age</i>
<i>Gender</i>		
Males	86	41
Females	124	59
<i>Income Group</i>		
Low	66	31.4
Middle	76	36.2
Upper	68	32.4
<i>Family Structure</i>		
Nuclear	124	59
Joint	86	41
<i>Types of Institutions</i>		
Government	108	51.2
Private	102	48.6
<i>Age</i>		
16yrs	65	31.0
17yrs	65	31.0
18yrs	40	19.0
19yrs	40	19.0
Mean age for total sample	17.26	

**Table 2. Correlation between self-esteem and Social Anxiety**

<i>Scales</i>	<i>Pearson r</i>	<i>Significance level</i>
IAS		
RSE	-.418(**)	.01

**Table 3. Correlation (partial) Between Self-esteem and Social Anxiety by controlling the affect of variables age, gender and total income of family**

<i>Control Variables</i>	<i>Variables</i>	<i>Pearson r</i>	<i>Significance level</i>
Age	IA		
Gender	SE	-.417	.000
Income group			

**Table 4. Summary of Linear Regression with Self Esteem as a predictor of Social Anxiety**

<i>Predictor</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R Square</i>	<i>Adjusted R Square</i>	<i>Std. Error of the Estimate</i>
Self Esteem	.418(a)	.175	.171	7.245

a Predictors: (Constant), SE

Multiple regression analysis yields significant results reflecting Self esteem as significant predictors of social anxiety [ $R^2 = .175$ ,  $F(1, 208) = 44.149$ ,  $p < .001$ ], causing 17.5 % variation.

**Table 5. Analysis of Variance of Linear Regression with self esteem as a predictor of Social Anxiety**

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	2317.330	1	2317.330	44.149	.000(a)
Residual	10917.665	208	52.489		
Total	13234.995	209			

- a. Predictors: (Constant), Self esteem
- b. Dependent Variable: Social Anxiety

**Table 6. Coefficients of Linear Regression with self esteem as a predictor of Social Anxiety**

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	SE	Beta		
Constant	53.365	2.044		26.107	.000
SE	-.644	.097	-.418	-6.644	.000

**DISCUSSION**

Pearson Product Correlation coefficient and additionally used partial Correlation were conducted. Results show that negative correlation ( $r = -.418$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) were found between self-esteem and social anxiety. Same trends between these two variables ( $r = -.417$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) were also found after controlling the effects of gender, age and monthly income of family. These findings are consistent with the study of Sarasson et al., (1990), that individuals with positive self esteem enjoy the social interaction, while individual with the negative self esteem have low confidence and do not feel comfortable in social interactions. These findings are also consistent with the study conducted by Kocovski and Endler (2000) on the sample of undergraduates and found a negative correlation between self esteem and social anxiety ( $r = -.40$ ). For further explanations regression analysis also yields significant results reflecting self-esteem as significant predictors of social anxiety [ $R^2 = .175$ ,  $F(1, 208) = 44.149$ ,  $p < .001$ ] in adolescents, causing 17.5 % variation. According to Rivas Torres and colleagues (1995) in both younger and older adolescents the relationship between self-esteem and general health behavior found to be significant, as self-esteem explained significant variation in mental health behavior, social health behavior, and total health behavior.

The protective role of self-esteem in difficult social or performance situation is well recognized among social psychologists. Low self-esteem and a negative self-concept lead to serious emotional reactions and augmented self-defense efforts; which results in the person being more vulnerable to environmental or other clues, while high self esteem is linked with a better sense of ability and keep stable in stressful situation. As evidences suggest the concept of self is protective against stress (Longmore & DeMaris, 1997; Thoits, 1994).

According to Burns (1982) “the beliefs and evaluations people hold about them selves determine who they are, what they can do and what they can become”. These commanding internal demands influence the perception of an individual and leading their actions or behaviors. Therefore Raskin and Rogers (1995) stated that most of previous studies regarding low self-esteem, emphasizing on the view that negative responses are the result of a low self-concept. Further studies related to adolescents by Sauza and colleagues (2008) support the present study results that, while exposure to new social situations adolescents experience a sense of insecurity and low self esteem due to their perception of an inability to meet the expectations of society and that leads to anxiousness and when this anxiety become dispositional it severely hamper the functioning.

According to Zimbardo (1988) the self concept is a dynamic mental structure that interprets and mediates many interpersonal processes. Adolescents who be deficient in both a positive judgment of their own social approval and who are rated by their peers as unpopular fared the worst. As Brown and Alexander (1991) reported that individuals who rated themselves high in popularity among peer also have more positive self images. Self-perception is probably more important for feeling good about ourselves and our social standing amongst friends. During late adolescence, teens’ perceptions of their own social success may also contributes in individual’s over all positive perception of self, subsequently leads to high performance in all areas of life also help maintain high levels of self-esteem. This cycle also positively help them to handle the stressful situations which may adversely target their psychological well being and interpersonal relationships.

Low social acceptance, low self esteem, and negative interactions with peers, were also reported by socially anxious children (Ginsberg & colleagues, 1998). Feelings about themselves may affect the ability to deal with challenges in life. Positive or negative self value is based on the rating of an individual about his/her performance in different role and spheres of life. Positive self-esteem is a fundamental feature of psychological wellbeing that protects and facilitates better health and positive social behavior; as well as it also safeguards against the impact of negative influences. We can conclude that psychological well being also depends on the level of self evaluation.

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