



## International Journal of Research in Academic World

Received: 29/August/2023

IJRAW: 2023; 2(10):43-46

Accepted: 30/September/2023

# A Study on the Relationship between Social Anxiety, Fear of Negative Evaluation and Distress among Adolescent

\*<sup>1</sup>Jeevitha Jayaseelan and <sup>2</sup>Latha Munuswamy

\*<sup>1, 2</sup>MSc Counselling Psychology and Student Counsellor, Sacred Heart College, TPT, Tamil Nadu, India.

### Abstract

Social anxiety and fear of negative evaluation and distress has been found to be directly associated with each other in adolescence. The main objective of the present study was to analyse the relationship between social anxiety, fear of negative evaluation and distress among school going adolescent from a private school in Chennai. Adolescent boys and girls from the age group of 14-18 years participated in this study. A total of 195 students were randomly recruited and the data was collected using self-administered questionnaires, Social Phobia Inventory (SPIN), Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation (BFNE) by Leary (1983) and The Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10). The study result revealed a strong positive correlation between Social Anxiety and Fear of Negative Evaluation. Fear of Negatively Evaluated and the distress were found to be positively correlated and Social Anxiety and Distress were also positively correlated.

Among the 195 participants 72 have moderate levels and 58 of them have high levels of social anxiety. The fear of negative evaluation was found to be medium levels in 66 students and 65 student's had high levels. Majority 87 students had severe distress disorder. Female students were found to be high in social anxiety compared to male students. Urban students were higher in social anxiety compared to rural students. The findings of the study may be useful for the school management to explore and to mediate further into wellbeing activities and programs of the school going adolescent boys and girls. School counsellors should be recruited in all schools and they should be involved in creating counselling modules taking into consideration the results of this study.

**Keywords:** Social anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, distress, adolescent, school students

### Introduction

In the human life span adolescence is the period between 13 to 19 years, and it's a transitional period which falls between our childhood and adulthood. During this period, they undergo physical and psychological changes which is also called as pre-teen. (Kaja Perina *et al*, 2022) <sup>[17]</sup>.

During adolescence adolescent distance from family members specially parents and show more interest in their relationship with friends and romantic partners. More importance is given to their appearance and which is considered as more important to them (Kaja Perina *et al*, 2022) <sup>[17]</sup>. Due to all these psychological, physical and social changes adolescent face tremendous issues in their life and specially schools (Sharon Levy, 2022) <sup>[27]</sup>.

In this period of adolescence, they tend to be more independent and often don't like to be controlled by their parents. Sometimes family brought up childhood experiences create lot of troubles in their life and one among such an issue is social anxiety. Social anxiety is known to be the third most mental health disorder in the world. The adolescent who have social anxiety and not treating or overcoming that, sometimes they even carry the burden of it into their adulthood, which further may create issues in their work life and married life (Schneier FR, 2003) <sup>[25]</sup>. The major issue is most of the times

parents at home and teachers at school are unable to identify their signs and symptoms of social anxiety.

Though most adolescents undergo episodes of normal anxiety linked to the changes that drive along with adolescence, students with social anxiety experience fear that is out of control in the situations they face in social situations at school and in the society. Children and teenagers can be detected with a more generalized form of social anxiety disorder or in situations where they have to perform (Hitchcock, 2009) <sup>[11]</sup>. Like adults' social anxiety in adolescent is caused by various reasons like genetic factors, social, environmental and biological factors. It's a combination of things that are responsible for social anxiety (Jefferson JW, 2001) <sup>[15]</sup>.

Youngsters who have social anxiety have poor positive relationship (Pechorro *et al*, 2016) <sup>[20]</sup>. Adolescent who have a good secure social life with lot of love and attention from their parents, friends and collaterals develop trust on people and become helping others in their life. The opposite happens to adolescents who don't have good social support and love, they try to avoid people and develop fear in social situations (Brumariu & Kerns, 2008) <sup>[5]</sup>. When an adolescent fear being evaluated, he or she worries that they will be judged in social situations. When a person fears evaluation, they worry that

they will be judged in social situations (Reichenberger *et al*, 2017) [27].

Adolescents and everyone in our lives are evaluated in many areas of our day-to-day life like, home, school, relationships, and off course in social situations. Being evaluated itself creates fear and distress among the adolescent, and it is added more if he or she is already suffering from social anxiety (Clark & Wells, 1995) [6]. Middle school students from 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade are mostly evaluated by their peers. Fear of negative evaluation is often referred to as a fear of the "imaginary audience." With the prevalence and increase in the number of students having social anxiety, fear of negative evaluation and distress it is very important to do further research and increase awareness among the population and develop strategies to handle them.

### Participants

The chief focus of the present study was the adolescent school students both male and female. This study was conducted in a co-education private Matriculation Higher Secondary in Chennai. Total population size of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> students was 600 and out of which 200 respondents from the age group of 14 to 18 years were recruited for this study, out of which 100 were male and 100 were females. During the data analysis 5 respondents data was rejected due to unfilled areas, hence 195 respondents data was analysed.

### Research Process

The data was collected through three standardized questionnaires, Social Phobia Inventory which is also known as SPIN constructed by Connor *et al* in the year 2000. Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation (BFNE) by Leary (1983) to assess the fear of being negatively evaluated level and Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) to measure the distress levels.

Mean, SD, correlation and t-test were used to analyse the data.

### Results

Sample of school students consisted of 15 (7.7%) 14-15 years and 180 (92.3) 16 – 17 years (N=195) adolescents. Among them Male were 95 (48.7%) and female students were 100 (51.3%). They belonged to different religions, 164 (84.1%) were Hindus, 22(11.3%) Christian, 6(3.1%) Muslim and 3(1.5%) were from other religion. Out of 195 adolescent school children 95(48.7%) were studying in 11<sup>th</sup> std and 100 (51.3%) students were from 12<sup>th</sup> std. Most of the study respondents were from Urban 161(82.6%) areas and only 34(17.4%) were from rural areas. Regarding the number of siblings, Majority of the adolescent students 141 (72.3%) had one sibling, 21(10.8%) were single child, 27(13.8%) had two siblings, 4(2.1%) had three sibling and 2(1.0%) four and above siblings. The education status of there both their parents is majority 68(34.9%) of the fathers had completed their higher secondary, 44 (22.6%) secondary 41(21.0%) UG, 29 (14.9%) Others professional courses, 7(3.6%) PG and few 6 (3.1%) completed Primary education. Their mother's majority 69 (35.4%) Higher secondary, 53(27.6%) completed secondary education, 38(19.5%) UG, 18 (9.2%) other professional courses, 10(5.1) PG and few 7(3.6%) only had primary education. The results revealed that majority of the student's monthly family income was 161(82.6%) 9001, 22(11.3%) 5001-9000 Rs per month, 9(4.6%) 1001-5000Rs per month and only few 3(1.5%) earned Less than 1000 Rs per month. the social media usage on the adolescent student was, Majority 100(51.3%) used social media sometimes,

41(21.0%) adolescents used it very often, 32(16.4%) adolescent students used it most of the and 22(11.3%) Never used social media.

Table 1. Data was gathered from 195 participants from a private school. The social anxiety form was used to assess the levels of anxiety of adolescent during social situations (M =18.35, SD =11.99). The Fear of negative evaluation form was used to assess the fear of being negatively evaluated (M =29.63, SD =10.42). K10 was used to assess the Distress levels of the adolescent students (Mean = 27.81, SD =9.410).

**Table 1:** Min. Value, Max Value, Mean and SD of the Scales

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
Social Anxiety	195	0	65	18.35	11.996
Fear of Negative Evaluation	195	12	60	29.64	10.424
Distress	195	10	50	27.81	9.410

Table 2 to analyze the correlation between the study variables, Social Anxiety, Fear of Negative Evaluation and Distress, Pearson Product Moment correlation analysis was used. Result indicates that relationship between Social Anxiety and Fear of Negative Evaluation is positive,  $r = .45$ ,  $p = .00$ . Fear of being Negatively Evaluated and the distress are found to be positively correlated,  $r = .37$ ,  $p = .00$  and Social Anxiety and Distress were also positively correlated  $r = .362$ ,  $p = .00$

**Table 2:** Correlations between SA, FNE and Distress (N=195)

	1	2	3
SA	-		
FNE	.453**	-	
Distress	.374**	.362**	-

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3. Among the 195 participants 65 had low levels of Social Anxiety, 72 have moderate levels and 58 of them have high levels. The fear of being negatively evaluated was found to be very low in 64 adolescent student's, medium levels in 66 students and 65 student's had high levels. 44 students were when assessed for distress, 31 has mild disorder and 33 were likely to have mild distress disorder and 87 majority had severe distress disorder.

**Table 3:** Participants' Level of Social Anxiety (N=195)

Level	Frequency
Low	65
Medium	72
High	58

**Table 4:** Participants' Level of Fear of Negative Evaluation (N=195)

Level	Frequency
Low	64
Medium	66
High	65

**Table 5:** Participants' Level of Distress (N=195)

Level	Frequency
Likely to be well	44
Likely to have a mild disorder	31
Likely to have a moderate disorder	33
Likely to have a severe disorder	87

Table 6 to identify the gender differences in relation to social anxiety independent sample t test was performed. Results shows that the level of Social Anxiety levels of female (M =21.71, SD =12.69) was significantly more than that of the Male (M=14.82, SD =10.13),  $t(193) = -4.175, p = .00$  students. The gender difference related to the fear of negatively evaluated had no significant difference male (M =30.14, SD =11.10) and Female (M = 29.16, SD = 9.76),  $t(193) = .653, p = .514$  students. Distress levels of the adolescent students related to the gender also did show any difference, male (M = 2.79, SD = 1.245) and female (M = 2.88, SD = 1.200),  $t(193) = -517, p = .606$ .

**Table 6:** Results of Independent sample t test to compare Mean score of Male and Female (N=195)

	Male		Female		df	t	p
	M	SD	M	SD			
Social Anxiety	14.82	10.137	21.71	12.691	193	-4.175	.000
Fear of Negative Evaluation	30.14	11.105	29.16	9.766	193	.653	.514
Distress	2.79	1.245	2.88	1.200	193	-517	.606

Table 7. The difference in the levels of study variables related to the domicile (Rural and Urban) of the adolescent students was assessed using the Independent sample t test. The findings indicate that the there was a significant difference in the social anxiety of the students related to their domicile, the Urban students (M = 19.37, SD = 12.22) anxiety levels were higher compared to the rural (M =13.56, SD =9.63),  $t(193) = -2.603, p = .010$  students. Different were not found in the levels of Fear of negative evaluation due to students' domicile, Urban students (M =29.88, SD =10.60) and Rural students (M = 28.47, SD =9.605),  $t(193) = -.716, p = .475$ . There was no difference found in the levels of distress also, Urban students (M =2.86, SD =1.207) and Rural students (M = 2.71, SD = 1.292),  $t(193) = -683, p = .495$ .

**Table 7:** Results of Independent Sample t test to compare Mean score of Rural and Urban (N=195)

	Rural		Urban		df	t	p
	M	SD	M	SD			
Social Anxiety	13.56	9.633	19.37	12.224	193	-2.60	.010
Fear of Negative Evaluation	28.47	9.605	29.88	10.600	193	-716	.475
Distress	2.71	1.292	2.86	1.207	193	-683	.495

Table 8. Independent sample t test was performed to identify the significant differences of the study variables related to the students grade (11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>). The levels of social anxiety differed when assessed with the grade of the student 11<sup>th</sup> students (M = 16.44, SD = 11.27) and 12<sup>th</sup> students (M = 20.17, SD = 12.432),  $t(193) = -2.190, p = .030$ . No difference was found related to the grade of student in the other two variables, Fear of Negative Evaluation among 11<sup>th</sup> students (M = 20.17, SD = 12.432) and 12<sup>th</sup> students (M = 20.59, SD = 10.50),  $t(193) = -1.314, p = .190$ . Distress among 11<sup>th</sup> students (M =2.80, SD =1.181) and 12<sup>th</sup> students (M =2.87, SD =1.261),  $t(198) = -400, p = .690$ .

**Table 8:** Results of Independent Sample t test to compare mean score of 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Standard students

	11th		2th		df	t	p
	M	SD	M	SD			
Social Anxiety	16.44	11.270	20.17	12.432	193	-2.190	.030
Fear of Negative Evaluation	20.17	12.432	20.59	10.503	193	-1.314	.190
Distress	2.80	1.181	2.87	1.261	193	-400	.690

**Discussion**

The present study result suggests that there is a highly strong positive connection between Social Anxiety and adolescent students Fear of Negative Evaluation. The result is affirmed by prior research, a similar result was found in a study conducted at Vellore a district very close to the present study, where fear of negative evaluation had a significantly positive connect with the variable social anxiety among their adolescent study respondents (Ganesh Kumar J *et al* (2015) [8]. Another study led among university students also found similar results like the present study (Rannveig Sigurvinsdottir *et al*, 2021) [23]. Fear of Negative Evaluation and distress were found to be strongly correlated related in this study. A study conducted among university students where fear of being negatively evaluated was associated with symptoms of distress (Rannveig Sigurvinsdottir *et al*, 2021) [23]. A study undertook by Nonterah in the year 2015 also found a partially mediated relationship between fear of being evaluated, stress, anxiety and depression among adolescent students. The present study results found a strong positive correlation between Social Anxiety and Distress. Previous study affirmed that adolescents who had social anxiety showed different styles of stress type (Peng Zhang, 2016). Among the school adolescent's majority 72 have moderate social anxiety, 65 had low social anxiety, and 58 of them had high levels of social anxiety. Previous study affirmed that 54(12.8%) adolescent school children had social anxiety. the common type of social anxiety the adolescent was found to be avoiding giving speeches in social situations (Khyati Mehtalia, 2004) [18]. Fear of Negative evaluation among the study adolescent students was, 64 low levels, 66 medium levels and 65 adolescents had high levels of fear of negative evaluation. The result is affirmed by prior works, a similar study found majority 4<sup>th</sup> grade (85.5%) had moderate levels, most of the 1<sup>st</sup> grade (68.7%) had moderate level of fear of being negatively evaluated (Sohair Mabrouk Mohammed *et al.*, 2021). Distress levels of the adolescents in this present study were, 44 of them had no distress, 31 of them had mild distress disorder, 33 had moderate disorder and 87 which is majority had severe disorder. A study conducted in schools in Kerala, South India, results highlighted that there was severe distress found among 4.9% students, moderate distress was found among 5.4% students and majority (10.5%) of the students had mild psychological distress (TS Jaisooriya *et al*, 2017). In the present study findings, the female student's anxiety related to social situations was found to be higher than their counter parts. A study results also had social anxiety levels more in female respondents compared to the male respondents (Andualem Gebremichael Achiko, *et al*, 2019) [4]. In another study social anxiety of females was higher 26(5.7%) compared to male which was 6 (3.9%) (Geeta Shyamsunder Soohinda *et al* 2016). Where as in a study conducted by Khyati Mehtalia *et al* and his team in the year 2004, Social anxiety was equally present in both the genders. In the present study the level of anxiety due to social situations was found to be higher among the urban students compared to rural students. A study conducted by George (1986) [9] suggest that rural residence is more protective against anxiety disorders. Whereas in a study conducted by Philip in the year 2020 an opposite result was found, their study respondents who belonged to rural areas had higher anxious levels than urban respondents. The findings of the study may be useful for the school management to explore and to mediate further into wellbeing

activities and programs of the school going adolescent boys and girls. With this research parents can be made aware about the impact of these issues on their children and can develop more understanding and support their children. These results will help the government to understand the severity of the issue and help them formulate welfare activities and schemes. Lot of programmes can be conducted to help the students come out of anxiety during social situations, distress and fear of being negatively evaluated. School counsellors have to be compulsorily appointed in all the schools to help the students with psychosocial issues. Teaching life skills in school should be made compulsory where topics like personality development, emotional Intelligence, communication skills etc. should be taught.

## References

1. Anjum A, Hossain S, Hasan MZ, Uddin ME, Kurasaki M. Anxiety among urban, semi-urban and rural school adolescents in Dhaka, Bangladesh: Investigating prevalence and associated factors. *PLOS ONE*, 2022, 17(1).
2. *American Psychiatric Association. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed.)*. Washington, DC
3. Amna Iqbal, Amna Ajmal. Fear of Negative Evaluation and Social Anxiety in Young Adults Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan, *Peshawar Journal of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences*. 2018; 4(1):45-53.
4. Andualem Gebremichael Achiko, Ephrem Habte Shikuro. Social Anxiety Disorder among Children at Gofermeda Sub City, Hosanna Town, Ethiopia: Prevalence and Associated Factors. *Psychology*, 2019, 10(11).
5. Brumariu LE, Kerns KA. Mother-child attachment and social anxiety symptoms in middle childhood. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*. 2008; 29(5):393-402.
6. Clark DM, Wells A. A cognitive model of social phobia. In: Heimberg G, Liebowitz MR, Hope D, Scheier F, editors. *Social phobia: Diagnosis, assessment, and treatment*. New York: *The Guilford Press*, 1995, 69-93.
7. Emin Kurtuluş Sakarya. Examination of the Relationship between Fear of Negative Evaluation, Gender Role Stress, and Gender Equality of Female University Students. *International Journal on New Trends in Education and Their Implications*, 2021, 12(1).
8. Ganesh Kumar J, Athilakshmi R. Relationship between Fear of Negative Evaluation and Anxiety. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 2015, 3(1).
9. George LK, Hughes DC, Blazer DG. Urban/rural differences in the prevalence of anxiety disorders. *American Journal of Social Psychiatry*. 1986; 6(4):249-258.
10. Harikrishnan U. Arif Ali. Prevalence of social phobia among school going adolescents. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*. 2016; 4(1):2349-3429.
11. Hitchcock CA, Chavira DA, Stein MB. Recent findings in social phobia among children and adolescents. *The Israel Journal of Psychiatry and Related Sciences*. 2009; 46:34-44
12. Himaja Prabha P, Kiran Babu NC. Assertiveness and fear of negative evaluation among young adults. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 2021, 9(2).
13. Hubert Amu. Psychosocial distress among in-school adolescents in Mozambique: a cross-sectional study using the Global School-Based Health Survey data. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*, 2020, 14(38).
14. Jaisooriya TS, Geetha D, Beena KV, Beena M, Ellangovan K, Thennarasu K. Prevalence and correlates of psychological distress in adolescent students from India. *East Asian Arch Psychiatry*. 2020; 27(2):56-62.
15. Jefferson JW. Social Anxiety Disorder: More than Just a Little Shyness. *Prim Care Companion J Clin Psychiatry*. 2001; 3(1):4-9.
16. Joseph W. Fredrick & Aaron M. Luebbe. Prospective associations between fears of negative evaluation, fears of positive evaluation, and social anxiety symptoms in adolescence. *Child Psychiatry & Human Development*, 2022, 1(11).
17. Kaja Perina. 5 Reasons People Emotionally Abuse Others. *Psychology today*, 2022. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-mysteries-of-love/202201/5-reasons-people-emotionally-abuse-others>
18. Khyati Mehtalia GK Vankar. Social Anxiety in Adolescents. *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*. 2004; 46(3):221-7.
19. Lundh LG, Sperling M. Social anxiety and the post-event processing of socially distressing events. *Cognitive National Library of Medicine*, 2002, 15(9).
20. Pechorro *et al.* The Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents: Measurement Invariance and Psychometric Properties among a School Sample of Portuguese Youths. *Child Psychiatry Hum Dev*. 2016; 47(6):975-984.
21. Pengpid S Peltzer K. Prevalence and associated factors of psychological distress among a national sample of in-school adolescents in Morocco. *BMC Psychiatry*. 2020; 20(1):475.
22. Nonterah CW, Hahn NC, Utsey SO, Hook JN, Abrams JA, Hubbard RR, Opere-Henako A. Fear of negative evaluation as a mediator of the relation between academic stress, anxiety and depression in a sample of Ghanaian college students. *Psychology and Developing Societies*. 2015; 27(1):125-142.
23. Rannveig Sigurvinsdottir *et al.* Social Anxiety, Fear of Negative Evaluation, and Distress in a Virtual Reality Environment. *Cambridge University Press*. 2021; 38(2):109-118.
24. Reichenberger *et al.* No praise, please: Depressive symptoms, reactivity to positive social interaction, and fear of positive evaluation. *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry*, 2017, 8.
25. Schneier FR. Social anxiety disorder. *National library of medicine*. 2003; 327(7414):515-516.
26. Seyoung Kim, Naya Choi. The Relationships between Children's Ego Function and Fear of Negative Evaluation Affecting Academic Failure Tolerance in Early School Age: Analysis by Grade Level Considering Sustainability of Academic Motivation. *Journals Sustainability*, 2012, 12(5).
27. Sharon Levy. Substance use in Adolescence. *Merk Manual, Merk and Co*, 2022. <https://www.merckmanuals.com/home/children-s-health-issues/problems-in-adolescents/substance-use-in-adolescents>