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### Abstract

The study was conducted to investigate the impact of social anxiety on assertiveness a role of gender. Social anxiety is a persistent fear of social interactions due to severe evaluation apprehension. Assertiveness is an important social skill which promotes personal well-being. Correlational research design was used. Survey was conducted as a method of data collection. Students were selected through convenient sampling technique. Sample size was 200 (n=100 male, n=100 female) college students. The Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS) by Prendergast (2021) and the Rathus Assertiveness Scale (RAS) by Spencer Rathus (1973) were used to measure social anxiety and assertiveness. Findings of the study reveal that there was significant negative correlation between social anxiety and assertiveness. Moreover, results suggest that social anxiety is a negative predictor of assertiveness among college students. Female college students report higher level of social anxiety as compared to male. In addition, male are more assertive in their college life than females. To overcome the social anxiety education department gave the exposure of coping strategies.

**Keywords:** Social anxiety, assertiveness

### 1. Introduction

Social anxiety is a persistent fear of social interactions due to severe evaluation apprehension (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) and is recognized as one of the most common anxiety-mood disorders in the United States (Kessler, Petukhova, Sampson, Zaslavsky, & Wittchen, 2012). Social anxiety is associated with lower perceived social support (Calsyn, Winter, & Burger, 2005; Davidson, Hughes, George, & Blazer, 1994; La Greca & Lopez, 1998; Reinelt et al., 2014; Torgrud et al., 2004) and lower likeability (Heerey & Kring, 2007; Voncken, Alden, Bögels, & Roelofs, 2008; Voncken, Dijk, de Jong, & Roelofs, 2010). Social anxiety and perceived social support may have a reciprocal relationship (Calsyn et al., 2005), with more socially anxious individuals perceiving themselves as having fewer social resources available and the perception of social resources as being limited, in turn, increasing social anxiety. Although it may seem intuitive that individuals who are higher in social anxiety would have smaller social support networks and therefore have lower perceived social support, previous research has found that perceived social support is not as dependent on the size of one's social network but rather more on the satisfaction with the support that is available (Sarason, Levine, Basham, & Sarason, 1983). Social anxiety may impact perceived social support through mechanisms other than the size of individuals' social network.

Assertiveness is a mode of personal behavior and communication characterized by a willingness to stand up for one's needs and interests in an open and direct way. Assertiveness is an important social skill which promotes personal well-being. Most definitions of assertiveness emphasize direct expression of feelings, desires and thoughts in interpersonal contexts. Definitions of assertive behavior put an emphasis on individual rights. Alberti and Emmons (1990) stated that "assertive behavior promotes equality in human relationships, enabling us to act in our own best interests, to stand up for ourselves without undue anxiety, to express honest feelings comfortably, to exercise personal rights without denying the rights of others. Assertiveness is a mode of personal behavior and communication characterized by a willingness to stand up for one's needs and interests in an open and direct way. The assertive person stands up for things that matter to him or her while at the same time respecting the things that matter to others (Zimmerman & Luecke, 2010). Assertiveness has also been defined as the process of direct and appropriate communication of a person's needs, wants and opinions without punishing or putting down others (Arrindell & Ende, 1985). It can be used as an instrument for initiating and maintaining socially supportive relationships and hence enjoying better emotional wellbeing (Eskin, 2003). Assertiveness was considered to be a mean of self- development and achievement of maximum personal fulfillment and assertive skills in various communication fields in conjunction with the increased demands on social competence of the individual (Ivelina & Mavrodiiev, 2013).

#### 1.1. Gender differences in Social Anxiety

Women are more likely to exhibit social anxiety symptoms than men (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Asher et al., 2017), and women with social anxiety report lower psychosocial functioning levels than men (Xu et al., 2012). Socially anxious women and men also differ in the situations they fear, with women reporting greater fears related to authority and workplace situations and men indicating greater fears of dating (Xu et al., 2012). Social anxiety disorder (SAD) is a common and debilitating psychiatric disorder with an estimated lifetime prevalence rate of 12.1% (Kessler et al., 2005). It is characterized by a marked and persistent fear of one or more social situations (e.g., talking to a stranger or peer, going to a party) or performance activities (e.g., giving a speech) in which the person is exposed to unfamiliar people, or where they may face possible scrutiny by others (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Individuals with SAD fear they will act in a way (or show anxiety symptoms) that will be embarrassing and may lead to a negative evaluation by others (Alden & Taylor, 2010). As a result, they tend to avoid social situations, or endure them with significant distress. The difficulties in interpersonal interactions described above result in significant impairment in almost all facets of daily life, including relationships, work, and studies (e.g., Aderka et al., 2012, Alden and Taylor, 2004).

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Compared to individuals without SAD, those with the disorder are more likely to drop out of school prematurely (Stein & Kean, 2000), to have lower educational attainment (Katzelnick and Greist, 2001, Wittchen et al., 1999), to hold jobs below their level of qualification (Katzelnick & Greist, 2001), to have lower income and to be unemployed (Lecrubier et al., 2000), and even when employed, tend to miss 8 times more work days (Wittchen, Fuetsch, Sonntag, Müller, & Liebowitz, 2000). Individuals with SAD report poor quality of life (Alonso et al., 2004), are more likely to attempt suicide (Wunderlich, Bronisch, & Wittchen, 1998), and are more likely to have alcohol and nicotine dependence (Wittchen et al., 1999). Thus, SAD results in significant negative health, economic and functional consequences.

Considering the large body of research on SAD, and despite accumulating data about gender differences in other disorders (e.g., agoraphobia: Bekker, 1996; specific phobias: Fredrikson, Annas, Fischer, & Wik, 1996; obsessive-compulsive disorder: Bogetto, Venturello, Albert, Maina, & Ravizza, 1999; panic disorder: Barzega, Maina, Venturello, & Bogetto, 2001; generalized anxiety disorder: Vesga-López et al., 2008; posttraumatic stress disorder: Tolin & Foa, 2006; depression: Parker & Brotchie, 2010) there is a paucity of research directly examining gender differences in SAD. This is particularly surprising because several older epidemiological studies have found that SAD is more frequent in women compared to men (e.g., Kessler et al., 1994). Although the gender literature for SAD is limited, it can offer meaningful information for both researchers and clinicians (Schneier & Goldmark, 2015).

### 1.2. Gender differences in Assertiveness

Studies in assertiveness among gender have reported contradictory findings like; (Eskin, 2003; Qadir & Sugumar, 2013; Uzaina & Parveen, 2015; Rathee, 2015, & Applebaum, 1976) did not find sex differences in assertiveness among adolescents. While (Prakash & Devi, 2015; Hersen et al, 1973) reported that males were more assertive. Other findings like (Chandler et al, 1978) found that women were significantly more assertive than men in some specific situations.

### 1.3. Statement of the Problem

Today's college students are tomorrow's leaders and this naturally calls for the shaping of their behaviour. Many students find it difficult to express themselves effectively in social situations. This undermines their significant role in the development of modern Pakistan and also in improving and strengthening the society. They are the pillars of a nation and play an important role in contributing much to its social development. So it is important for the college students to be assertive, because being assertive can help them in many ways. The conducted study was designed by the researcher to find out the impact of social anxiety on assertiveness among college students. This will be helpful in further identification of the areas of assertiveness to work upon.

### 1.4. Objectives of the Study

- To investigate the impact of social anxiety on assertiveness
- To examine the difference of social anxiety and assertiveness between male and female college students

## 2. Research Method

### 2.1. Participants

The nature of the study was quantitative that was completed through correlational research design. The process of data collection was accomplished by conducting a survey with questionnaires. Sample of study 239 college students were approached by using convenient sampling techniques.

### 2.2. Instruments

Two research instrument were used;

1. The Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS)
2. The Rathus Assertiveness Scale (RAS)

**The Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS)** by Prendergast (2021), is a 24-item, self-rated scale used to assess how social anxiety plays a role in your life across a variety of situations. The scale might be used in research studies to determine the level of social anxiety experienced by participants, in clinical settings to assess a particular patient's symptoms, or by people who are concerned that what they are experiencing might be the signs of an anxiety disorder.

**The Rathus Assertiveness Scale (RAS)** was designed to measure a person's level of assertiveness. The RAS was developed in 1973 by Spencer Rathus. The scale contains 30 items in total, with items scored from very characteristic of me to very uncharacteristic.

## 3. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed on SPSS by using inferential statistics to test hypotheses. Pearson correlation coefficient, liner regression and t-test for independent samples design were performed.

## 4. Results

**Table 1: Relationship between Social Anxiety and Assertiveness**

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	M	SD	SA	A
Social Anxiety	.890	23.73	19.021	1	-.819**
Assertiveness	.781	19.14	11.915		1

Correlation is significant (p<0.05).

**Table 2: Regression Analysis showing the impact of Social Anxiety on Assertiveness**

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t-test	p-value
Constant	51.921	7.271		8.307	.000
Social Anxiety	.517	.463	-.819	-17.856	.000

Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> .691, p<0.05.

**Table 3: Mean, Standard Deviation, t-value and score of Social Anxiety between male and female**

Variable	Gender	N	M	Std. Deviation	t-test	df	p-value
Social Anxiety	Male	100	29.01	19.631	9.531	198	.000
	Female	100	37.89	25.719			

Table 3 shows the statistical significant mean difference of Social Anxiety between male and female.

**Table 4: Mean, Standard Deviation, t-value and score of Assertiveness with respect to gender**

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-test	df	p-value
Assertiveness	Male	100	47.86	33.018	13.731	198	.000
	Female	100	39.95	28.628			

Table 3 shows the comparison of assertiveness.

## 5. Discussion

Social anxiety is a persistent fear of social interactions due to severe evaluation apprehension. Today's students are tomorrow's leaders and this naturally calls for the shaping of their behaviour. Many students find it difficult to express themselves effectively in social situations. This undermines their significant role in the development of modern Pakistan and also in improving and strengthening the society. They are the pillars of a nation and play an important role in contributing much to its social development. Assertiveness is a skill regularly referred to in social and communication skills training. Being assertive means being able to stand up for your own or other people's rights in a calm and positive way, without being either aggressive, or passively accepting 'wrong'. Assertive individuals are able to get their point across without upsetting others, or becoming upset themselves. Findings of the current study reveal that there is negative correlation between social anxiety and assertiveness among adolescent. Moreover, it was examined that social anxiety is a significant negative predictor of assertiveness. In addition, male students reported greater level of assertiveness as compared to females. While (Prakash & Devi, 2015; Hersen et al, 1973) reported that males were more assertive. Other findings like (Chandler et al, 1978) found that women were significantly more assertive than men in some specific situations. Findings of the study were contradictory in the light of previous study. Furthermore, female students were found with higher level of social anxiety than male. Results of the study are line up with previous studies. Women are more likely to exhibit social anxiety symptoms than men (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Asher et al., 2017), and women with social anxiety report lower psychosocial functioning levels than men (Xu et al., 2012). Socially anxious women and men also differ in the situations they fear, with women reporting greater fears related to authority and workplace situations and men indicating greater fears of dating (Xu et al., 2012).

## 6. Conclusion

Social anxiety is a persistent fear of social interactions due to severe evaluation apprehension. Assertiveness is a skill regularly referred to in social and communication skills training. Findings of the current study reveal that there is negative correlation between social anxiety and assertiveness among adolescent. Moreover, it was examined that social anxiety is a significant negative predictor of assertiveness. Results reported that males were more assertive. Female are more likely to exhibit social anxiety symptoms than male students.

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