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## Social Anxiety Among Male and Female Adults: A Comparative Study

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### ABSTRACT

Social anxiety, commonly referred to as social phobia, is a long-term and overwhelming fear of social situations. This study examines the prevalence and characteristics of social anxiety among male and female adults, analysing gender-based differences in anxiety levels. A sample of 60 participants (30 males, 30 females) was assessed using the Social Anxiety Questionnaire for Adults (SAQ-A30). Statistical analysis revealed no significant differences in social anxiety levels between males and females, suggesting that gender does not play a defining role in the severity of social anxiety. Implications for therapeutic interventions and future research directions are discussed.

### Introduction

Social anxiety disorder (SAD), characterized by an intense fear of social situations, often impairs an individual's ability to function effectively in personal and professional settings (Mayo Clinic, 2021). Social anxiety typically manifests during adolescence but can persist into adulthood, leading to significant psychological and emotional distress. Symptoms include excessive self-consciousness, avoidance behaviours, and physiological responses such as sweating, trembling, and rapid heartbeats (Smith, 2023). The present study investigates social anxiety levels among adults aged 18–40, with a specific focus on gender differences. Understanding these differences is critical for tailoring interventions and improving mental health outcomes. Previous research suggests mixed findings regarding gender-based variations in social anxiety, warranting further exploration.

### Method

#### Research Design

The study employed a quantitative, descriptive research design to measure social anxiety levels among male and female adults.

#### Participants

A total of 60 participants (30 males and 30 females) aged 18–40 were recruited using convenient and purposive sampling methods. All participants resided in Kerala, India. Inclusion criteria included adults within the specified age range, while individuals with psychological disturbances or unwillingness to participate were excluded.

## **Instrument**

The Social Anxiety Questionnaire for Adults (SAQ-A30), developed by Caballo et al. (2012), was used to assess social anxiety. The scale comprises 30 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater levels of anxiety. The SAQ-A30 demonstrates high reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.92$ ) and strong validity.

## **Procedure**

Data were collected via Google Forms, ensuring participant anonymity and informed consent. Participants completed the SAQ-A30 along with demographic details, including age, gender, and socioeconomic status.

## **Results**

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare social anxiety levels between males and females. The mean scores for males ( $M = 75.24$ ,  $SD = 16.73$ ) and females ( $M = 69.72$ ,  $SD = 17.51$ ) showed no statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level ( $t[58] = 1.31$ ,  $p = 0.721$ ). Consequently, the null hypothesis—that there is no significant difference in social anxiety levels between genders—was supported.

## **Discussion**

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The findings indicate that gender does not significantly influence social anxiety levels among adults, aligning with earlier studies by Caballo et al. (2008) and Jefferies and Ungar (2013). These studies also highlighted minimal gender-based variations in social anxiety, emphasizing the role of individual and cultural factors over biological sex.

Notably, while males reported higher levels of anxiety in specific situations such as public speaking, females exhibited greater anxiety in scenarios involving authority figures or being the center of attention (Leary & Kowalski, 1997). These nuanced differences underscore the importance of context in understanding social anxiety.

### **Implications for Practice**

Understanding the universality of social anxiety across genders can inform the development of gender-neutral therapeutic interventions. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) remains a cornerstone in treating social anxiety, focusing on restructuring maladaptive thoughts and encouraging gradual exposure to feared situations (Clark & Wells, 1995).

Further, awareness campaigns could destigmatize social anxiety, encouraging individuals to seek professional help. Educational programs could target adolescents and young adults, a demographic particularly vulnerable to SAD (APA, 2013).

### Conclusion

This study contributes to the understanding of social anxiety by demonstrating the absence of significant gender differences in anxiety levels among adults. These findings highlight the need for gender-neutral therapeutic interventions and call for further exploration of cultural and individual factors influencing social anxiety.

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