Relationship Between Social Anxiety and Self-Esteem among Indian College Students

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Abstract

This study aims to understand the relationship between self-esteem and social anxiety in Indian college students. 84 college students in the age range of 18 - 26 were selected as the sample and completed Rosenberg's self-esteem scale and Liebowitz social anxiety scale to measure self-esteem and social anxiety respectively. The results showed a moderate negative correlation between self-esteem and social anxiety in the total sample. Similar results were obtained for correlation between self-esteem and social anxiety in boys and girls separately. But there was no statistical difference between the correlation of self-esteem and social anxiety between boys and girls (p > 0.05). Boys and girls had a similar mean score on Rosenberg's self-esteem scale, but girls scored a higher mean score on Liebowitz social anxiety scale, showing girls are more socially anxious than boys. Results suggest that self-esteem and social anxiety share a significant relationship with each other and methods for prevention, assessment, diagnosis, and treatment planning for social anxiety may be improved by considering the impacts of self-esteem.

Keywords: Social Anxiety; Self-Esteem; Relationship

Introduction

Self-esteem is a widely used concept in psychology. The term self-esteem describes an individual's subjective evaluation of his /her own worth, or how much a person values, appreciates, or likes him or herself [1]. The most cited definition of self-esteem is Rosenberg's [2], he described self-esteem as one's positive or negative attitude toward oneself and one's evaluation of one's own thoughts and feelings overall in relation to oneself.

No human is an island alone. Humans are fundamentally social creatures and prefer to live in groups. The need for intimacy, relationships, and recognition from social groups is necessary for leading a healthy and satisfactory life. The development of self begins from the early stages of development itself and is said to influence many other spheres of our life and overall well-being. One of these spheres is social interaction. Experiencing rejection and ostracism from social groups can adversely affect one's self-esteem. Or vice versa, low self-esteem can prevent a person from participating in social interactions.

There have been studies to showcase that social interactions and self-esteem go hand in hand. Leary MR and Baumeister RF [3] used sociometer theory to reinterpret interpersonal interactions in terms of self-esteem. Human organisms are characterized by a basic need to belong--a fundamental motivation to form and maintain at least a handful of meaningful social attachments. Self-esteem is a potent response to social interactions because it performs the essential job of monitoring and reacting to social acceptance and rejection. There

are theories that strongly suggest a link between social relationships and self-esteem [4] and the link is found to be truly reciprocal across the lifespan.

Self-esteem among students is especially one of the influencing factors behind social inclusion in classrooms. In their study on school students, Wagner J, Lüdtke O, Robitzsch A, Göllner R and Trautwein U [5] tested effects of interpersonal relationship on self-esteem development in the classroom context. The intrapersonal component of better social inclusion was found to be beneficial for self-esteem when it was considered as a between-person effect or as a within-person increase in social inclusion across time.

Self-esteem has been associated with a number of mental health difficulties. Fennell [6] proposed that low-self-esteem can either increase an individual's vulnerability to developing a mental health problem or can develop as a consequence of a variety of mental health difficulties. Individuals with low self-esteem face different issues in their relationships, they may be (even disabling) overly self-conscious, over-sensitive to criticism and disapproval and problem in expressing their needs. They may show excessive eagerness to please-even outright withdrawal from any sort of intimacy or contact. There are people, who adopt a policy of always being the life and soul of a party, always appear confident, in control or always try to put others first, at any cost. They believe that if they do not put on this sort of front, people will simply not want to know them or befriend them.

Studies clearly establish that self-esteem and social relationships influence each other and hence share a reciprocal relationship with each other. Following along this line there have also been investigations to see if there is a relationship between self-esteem and social anxiety as well. Mull Lisa J [7] did a study to understand the interrelationships of self-esteem, social anxiety and introversion in the college students. The study indicated that introverts with low self-esteem are more susceptible to social anxiety than introverts with high self-esteem. An individual's negative core beliefs cause social anxiety which might be rooted in low self-esteem.

It is also to note that a person who is involved in their social circles can also influence these two variables. Ghayas Saba [8] studied the role of social connectedness as a mediator in the relationship between self-esteem and social anxiety and found that self-esteem positively predicts social connectedness and it negatively predicted social anxiety. A study on university students [9] indicated that female students scored high on Social Anxiety Scale in comparison to male students, and the self-esteem of socially anxious students was found to be low than the non-anxious students.

In India studies on self-esteem and social anxiety have been few in numbers, especially when it comes to young adults. But in the few studies the available correlation between self-esteem and social anxiety was found there as well [10]. Gender may also have an influence on self-esteem and social anxiety, especially in a society such as India where gender norms and roles are so rigid [11].

Objectives of the Study

- To find and examine the relationship between self-esteem and social anxiety among a sample of college students.

- To find, examine, and compare self-esteem and social anxiety and its relationship between boys and girls of the given sample.

Method

Sample

The sample for the present study comprises eighty-four (84) individuals of which forty (40) were males and forty (40) were females and the rest four (4) were non-binary in the age range of 18 - 26. All the participants were college students (undergraduate/postgraduate) and belonged to urban living areas. The sample could be described as incidental as only those students were included in the sample who fulfilled the criteria of education and age as well as were willing to participate in the study.

Tests used for the study

1. Rosenberg self-esteem scale (RSES) is a tool to assess an individual's global self worth. It is developed by Morris Rosenberg and is used widely in social research. It is a ten item scale, of which five items are positively worded and five are negatively worded. It is scored on a 4 point rating scale that ranges from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Scores above 25 show high self-esteem, range of 15 - 25 is average and a score less than 15 indicate low self-esteem. The Rosenberg self-esteem scale is highly reliable and it has good predictive value too. Test-retest reliability for a 2 week and 7 month interval was calculated at 0.85 and 0.63 respectively, and Cronbach coefficient for various samples is in the range of .77 to .88.

2. Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale-Self-Report version (1987) LSAS is a self-rated instrument, which consist of 24 items that assess the degree of fear or anxiety and the frequency of avoidance associated with different social situations. Each subscale is scored separately on a Likert scale of 0-3. The overall score for the scale, as well as for both subscales, is obtained by summing the ratings everyone provides. The score of 80 and above indicate severe social phobia. Internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha was between .84 and .91 for the Avoidance subscale and for Anxiety subscale it was between .83 and .92, and between .86 and .95 for the total score (Salazar, 2013; González., *et al*). The test's split-half reliability of the total score was reported to be in the range of .79 to .94 (Salazar, 2013).

Procedure

The aim of the present investigation is to study the relationship between self-esteem and social anxiety among college students. Towards this aim, a Google form was created which contained both Rosenberg self-esteem scale and Liebowitz Social Anxiety scale, necessary instructions, information about the testing tools used, and a consent form for participants. The google form was shared through social media platforms with individuals who met the criteria for the present study. Participants were college students (undergraduate/postgraduate) drawn from the age group of 18 - 26 with basic English proficiency and urban background. Responses from the participants were recorded via google forms.

The data were scored according to the scoring guidelines in the respective manuals. Obtained data was analyzed with Correlational analysis. The statistical analyses was done with the use of MedCalc.

Statistical analyses

In order to address the objectives of the study, descriptive and inferential statistics were used. In this context, means and SDs were computed. Pearson-Product Moment Correlation was applied to the obtained empirical data. To find the difference between the correlation of boys and girls Fisher's r-to-z transformation was also applied. All analysis was carried out using MedCalc 20.006.

Results

The main objective of this study was to find the relationship between self-esteem and social anxiety among college students. To achieve this objective, data collected from 84 college students (undergraduate/postgraduate) of 18 - 26 years age group was collected through social media platforms. The subjects were administered the Rosenberg Self-esteem scale and Liebowitz social anxiety scale. Obtained scores were subjected to correlational analysis to find the relationship between self-esteem and social anxiety.

Scale	Mean and SD	Total sample (N = 84)	Female (N = 40)	Male (N = 40)
Rosenberg self-esteem scale	Mean	17.464	17.15	17.92
	SD	5.19	4.76	5.76
Liebowitz social anxiety scale	Mean	54.19	56.95	50.55
	SD	32.22	28.79	35.93

Table 1: *Depicts the means, standard deviations on both the scales.*

The mean levels of both scales were examined to understand the sample. The sample had an average score of 17.464 on the Rosenberg self-esteem scale which comes under the normal range according to the scoring norms. Meanwhile, the sample had an average score of 54.19 on the Liebowitz social anxiety scale and comes under the moderate social anxiety range according to the scoring norms of the scale.

Girls had an average score of 17.15 on the Rosenberg self-esteem scale which comes under the normal range of self-esteem according to the scoring norms of the scale. But girls had an average score of 56.95 on the Liebowitz social anxiety scale and came under moderate social anxiety range according to the scoring norms of the scale.

Boys had an average score of 17.92 on the Rosenberg self-esteem scale which comes under the normal range of self-esteem according to the scoring norms of the scale. But boys had an average score of 50.55 on the Liebowitz social anxiety scale and came under moderate social anxiety range according to the scoring norms of the scale. Compared to the social anxiety mean level of girls (M = 56.95), boys had a lower mean level in social anxiety (M = 50.55).

Scale	Total Sample (N = 84)	Female (N = 40)	Male (N = 40)
Rosenberg self-esteem scale	-	-	-
Liebowitz social anxiety scale	-0.67**	-0.64**	-0.72**

Table 2: Depicts the correlation between scales.
**p < 0.01.

Other factors can be taken into consideration in finding how it influences the self-esteem and social anxiety of the above table shows that self-esteem and social anxiety are negatively correlated at -0.67 which is statistically significant at p < 0.01. This satisfies our hypothesis that self-esteem and social anxiety are negatively correlated.

For girls self-esteem and social anxiety are negatively correlated at -0.64 which is statistically significant at p < 0.01. Although it is to note that the correlation between self-esteem and social anxiety in girls (-0.64) is slightly weaker than the correlation in the total sample (-0.67).

For boys self-esteem and social anxiety are negatively correlated at -0.72 which is statistically significant at p < 0.01. Although it is to be noted that self-esteem and social anxiety are negatively correlated more highly in boys (-0.72) when compared to both the total sample (-0.67) and correlation in girls (-0.64).

Difference in correlation

Using the Fisher r-to-z transformation, a value of z was calculated that can be applied to assess the significance of the difference between two correlation coefficients, ra (girls) and rb (boys), found in two independent samples. The two correlation coefficients are significantly different from each other is indicated by the probability value of less than 0.05. The value of z was found to be 0.65 with p > 0.05. This means the difference in correlation of self-esteem and social anxiety was not statistically significant between boys and girls.

Discussion

The chief aim of this study was to understand the relationship between self-esteem and social anxiety and to what degree they are interrelated. It was hypothesized that self-esteem and social anxiety are negatively correlated. That is, if self-esteem decreases, social anxiety would increase and vice versa. It was hence theorized that people who have low self-esteem are likely to have high social anxiety.

To test this hypothesis, Pearson-Product Moment Correlation was applied to the total sample, which consisted of 40 boys, 40 girls, and 4 non-binary individuals. It was found that self-esteem and social anxiety have a moderate negative correlation. These results suggest that if a person has low self-esteem, there is a moderate likeliness of them having increased social anxiety and vice versa.

This result is in accordance with the hypothesis this study proposed, which was: Lower self-esteem would indicate higher social anxiety. Previous studies and research are consistent with this finding as well. In the study of Mull Lisa J [7] on college students, results suggested that self-esteem may be a stronger predictor of social anxiety. In a similar finding, Parvez, Irshad [9] investigated the self-esteem of socially anxious university students. The students who were socially anxious scored low on self-esteem, hence validating the hypothesis of this current study.

In the Indian studies as well similar conclusions were drawn. In a study Mundada N [10] tried to find the effect of self-consciousness and self-esteem on social anxiety among college students. The results showed a negative correlation between self-esteem and social anxiety. The correlation coefficient was -0.58 which was found to be significant at 0.01 level, which is near the correlation coefficient found in the current study for the total sample (-0.67).

In addition to the above, average scores in Rosenberg's self-esteem scale and Liebowitz social anxiety scale were calculated as well for the total sample. While self-esteem was found to be in the normal range for college students, the mean level for social anxiety in college students was interpreted as moderate. This is in line with previous research done on Indian college students [12] where students were found to be socially anxious. Although, it is to be noted that more statistical tools and bigger sample size are needed for clearer and concrete conclusions.

In sum, previous research has demonstrated that people with low self-esteem are more likely to have social anxiety and vice-versa. The current study has aided in clarifying this relationship and has confirmed the hypothesis among Indian college students of urban areas. In addition, it has also been found that Indian college students have moderate social anxiety going by the average score on Liebowitz social anxiety scale.

Beyond the hypothesis given, the study also had the objective to compare the boys and girls as independent samples. To this aim, it was found that the average score (17.15) of girls in Rosenberg's self-esteem scale is almost similar to boys' average score (17.92), by which we can infer that self-esteem in boys and girls is almost on the same mean level. On the other hand, in the Liebowitz social anxiety scale, it was found that the average score of girls (56.95) is higher than boys' average score (50.55), by which we can tentatively predict that girls are more socially anxious than boys are. This is in line with previous research such as Parvez, Irshad [9] where college girls similarly scored higher than boys on Liebowitz social anxiety scale. Rigid gender roles, overt parental control, societal scrutiny, and restricted freedom and safety for girls in India might be some factors that lead to girls being more socially anxious compared to boys, as their actions are judged and scrutinized more compared to their counterparts.

In addition to comparing average scores, the correlation between self-esteem and social anxiety among boys and girls was compared as well. Boys had a correlation coefficient of -0.72 ($p < 0.01$) between self-esteem and social anxiety and girls had a correlation of -0.64 ($p < 0.01$). At first glance, it would seem that the relationship between self-esteem and social anxiety is stronger in boys compared to girls by the virtue of their correlation coefficients. But Fisher's r-to-z transformation was used to find if there is a significant difference between the two correlation coefficients of boys and girls. But as per the result, the difference was found to be not statistically significant, hence rejecting the hypothesis of any difference in correlation of self-esteem and social anxiety between boys and girls.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current study has confirmed that self-esteem and social anxiety share a reciprocal relationship between each other among Indian college students. The average level of self-esteem in the total sample was in the normal range, but the average level of social

anxiety in the total sample was moderate. In addition, it was also seen that girls had a higher average score in social anxiety compared to boys but are almost similar in self-esteem to the boys. And finally, there is no statistical difference in the relationship between self-esteem and social anxiety among boys and girls.

The study has shown an interesting and important facet of Indian youth. Self-esteem is undoubtedly correlated to social anxiety. The study can be used to investigate further self-esteem and social anxiety in Indian youth. Culture, gender roles among Indian youth.

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