



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



## Social anxiety and fear of intimacy among young adults

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### Abstract

This study was conducted to better understand the relationship between social anxiety and fear of intimacy among young adults. Socially anxious individuals characteristically report fear of evaluation and scrutiny by others, we hypothesized that there is no impact of social anxiety on fear of intimacy among young adults, including the difference in social anxiety and fear of intimacy among males and females. Self-report data were collected from 81 males and 119 females aged 18- 25 years of age residing in the city of Bangalore, India. The tools used in the study were Social interaction anxiety scale (SIAS) was designed by Mattick and Clarke and The Fear of Intimacy Scale designed by Michelle, Mark & Thelen. The study found a positive correlation between social anxiety and fear of intimacy in young adults, rejecting the hypothesis that there is no relationship between the two variables. The independent t-test showed no significant difference in social anxiety or fear of intimacy between males and females. Multiple linear regression analysis revealed that social anxiety affects fear of intimacy, as an increase in anxiety leads to an increase in social anxiety. Therefore, the hypothesis that social anxiety impacts fear of intimacy was rejected. The findings suggest that social anxiety may be a significant factor in determining social anxiety levels. The study provides insights into the challenges young adults with social anxiety face in forming close relationships, suggesting that identifying social anxiety could predict and address intimacy fear, potentially leading to more comprehensive treatment plans.

**Keywords:** Social Anxiety; Fear of Intimacy; Young adults; Correlational Research

### 1. Introduction

Social anxiety (SA) and fear of intimacy(FoI) are two common challenges faced by young adults, and they can often be interconnected. Social anxiety, also known as social phobia, is characterized by intense fear or anxiety in social situations where individuals feel they may be judged, embarrassed, or scrutinized by others. This fear can lead to avoidance of social interactions and can significantly impact a person's daily life and relationships. Social anxiety and fear of intimacy in young adults can interact in complex ways. Social anxiety may lead to avoiding close relationships due to fear of social interactions, while fear of intimacy may cause anxiety in social situations where intimacy is expected. Mental health professionals can help young adults with these issues by providing cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), exposure therapy, and interpersonal therapy. Building social skills, practicing self-compassion, and gradually exposing oneself to social and intimate situations can help overcome these challenges and build more fulfilling relationships.

Fear of intimacy in adult relationships may result from social anxiety disorders or social phobia. People fearing criticism or rejection may avoid personal relationships as a coping mechanism. Social anxiety disorder patients may also experience strong physical symptoms, such as rapid heart rate, nausea, and sweating, and may experience full-blown attacks when confronting a feared situation. Despite acknowledging their fear is excessive and unreasonable, individuals with social anxiety disorder often feel powerless against their anxiety.

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The aim of the study was to understand the relationship between Social anxiety and Fear of intimacy among young adults. The study also wanted to understand the difference in Social anxiety

and Fear of intimacy between males and females along with understanding the impact of Fear of intimacy on Social anxiety. The data was collected in online mode within the age group of 18 - 25 years from 81 males and 119 females residing in city of Bengaluru, Karnataka, India. The tools used in the study were Social interaction anxiety scale (SIAS) and Fear of Intimacy Scale. The data was entered into Microsoft Excel and then exported into SPSS 20 for statistical analysis.

### *Objectives of the study*

- To find the relationship between social anxiety and fear of intimacy among young adults.
- To find the difference in social anxiety among males and females.
- To find the difference in fear of intimacy among males and females.
- To find the impact of social anxiety on fear of intimacy among young adults.

### **1.1. Need and Significance of the Study**

The variables social anxiety and fear of intimacy have not been studied together among young adults. As young adults begin to build adult relationships, they might be prone to fearing rejection or criticism from others. Fear if intimacy may have a direct effect on almost every relationship an adult has. If the relationship is found social anxiety can be studied as a predictor and can be used to reduce the fear of intimacy. The study may open new areas for application of social anxiety therapies among young adults.

### **1.2. Research Gap**

The variables, social anxiety and fear of intimacy haven't been studied together thus, the relationship among these variables hasn't been studied among young adults. This is a surprising gap considering both are relevant during this life stage.

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## **2. Material and methods**

### **2.1. Research design**

Correlational Research Design.

### **2.2. Objectives of the study**

- To find the relationship between social anxiety and fear of intimacy among young adults.
- To find the difference in social anxiety among males and females.
- To find the difference in fear of intimacy among males and females.
- To find the impact of social anxiety on fear of intimacy among young adults.

### **2.3. Hypotheses**

- Ho1: There is no relationship between social anxiety and fear of intimacy among young adults.
- Ho2: There is no significant difference in social anxiety among males and females.
- Ho3: There is no significant difference in fear of intimacy among males and females.
- Ho4: There is no impact of social anxiety on fear of intimacy among young adults.

### **2.4. Operational Definition**

#### *2.4.1. Social Anxiety*

Fear of social situations in which embarrassment may occur (e.g., making conversation, meeting strangers, dating) or there is a risk of being negatively evaluated by others (e.g., seen as stupid, weak, or anxious). Social anxiety involves apprehensiveness about one's social status, role, and behavior.

#### *2.4.2. Fear of Intimacy*

Although they might be closely related, the fear of intimacy and the fear of vulnerability are two different things. There are frequently boundaries to how vulnerable a person living with a FoI will allow themselves to be, even if at first they may feel comfortable being exposed and revealing their genuine selves to the public.

#### *2.4.3. Young Adults*

Young adults are ones who follow the years after adolescence that is individuals aged 18- 25 years of age.

#### *2.4.4. Variables*

Social anxiety and Fear of intimacy are the two variables of the study.

- Dependent variable: social anxiety
- Independent variable: fear of intimacy

#### *2.4.5. Demographic Details*

Demographic details collected for the purpose of research are age and gender.

#### *2.4.6. Universe of the Study*

The population for the study is young adults. Young adults as per the relevance for my study are from age 18 years to 25 years. Both males and females are included in the study.

#### *2.4.7. Geographical Area*

The geographical areas focused on for the data collection is the city of Bangalore in Karnataka state, India.

#### *2.4.8. Sample Distribution*

The sample includes young adults with the age range of 18 years to 25 years. The sample for the study were 81 males and 119 females.

#### *2.4.9. Inclusion Criteria*

- Young adults with age range of 18- 25 years.
- Young adults who can read and understand English.
- Young adults studying in Bangalore, Karnataka.
- Young adults who are students.

#### *2.4.10. Exclusion Criteria*

- Young adults who have their own business or work in an organization.
- Young adults who do not identify as male or female.
- Young adults who are doing distance learning.

#### *2.4.11. Sample and Techniques*

Nonprobability sampling method is used for the sampling. Convenience Sampling is the data collection technique.

### **2.5. Research Ethics followed**

Informed consent was taken from the participants and confidentiality was assured. The participant was also informed about the right to withdraw from the study. The norms of the tools used for the study were followed and the scoring was also done keeping in mind the norms.

### **2.6. Tools for the Study**

The tools used in the study were Social interaction anxiety scale (SIAS) was designed by Mattick and Clarke in 1998. The Fear of Intimacy Scale was designed by Michelle, Mark & Thelen in 1996.

## 2.7. Description of the tool

Social interaction anxiety scale (SIAS) was designed by Mattick and Clarke (1998). The social interaction anxiety scale was discovered due to the lack of valid assessment tools that actually designed to assess interaction related fears and the more generalized social interaction anxieties like communicating with friends and strangers or attending a social gathering/party, which were considered as the main features of social phobia in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (4th ed.; DSM-IV; American Psychiatric Association, 1994). This scale was used for the purpose of assessment before the in-person interview. It is a 20 statement scale that rates from 0 to 4, where 0 indicates that the item is not characteristic of the individual and 4 indicates that the item is extremely characteristic of the individual. The SIAS possesses a high internal consistency and test-retest reliability (Cronbach's alpha .93 and  $r = 0.92$  respectively) (Mattick & Clarke, 1998).

Fear of Intimacy Scale was designed by Michelle, Mark & Thelen in 1996. It is a 35 item measure that was designed to assess the fear of intimacy in a close relationship or at the prospect of a close relationship. Participants respond to the items using 5 point likert type scale ranging from 1(not at all characteristic of me) to 5 (extremely characteristic of me). The provided evidence for the validity of the scale with a college age sample based on convergence with similar measures and therapists' subjective ratings of their clients' fear of intimacy. They reported 1month test retest reliability for the scale of 0.89 and a coefficient alpha of 0.93. The Cronbach's coefficient alpha for this sample was 0.90

## 2.8. Statistical Analysis

The results are analysed using correlation to understand the relationship between the variables, independent sample t-test to find the difference among males and females and multiple linear regression to understand the impact of social anxiety on fear of intimacy.

### 2.8.1. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics is used to summarize the data, understand the representation of the population by selected sample. Central tendency and standard deviation are calculated.

### 2.8.2. Inferential Statistics

Inferential statistics is used to test the hypothesis using correlation, independent sample t-test and multiple linear regression analysis.

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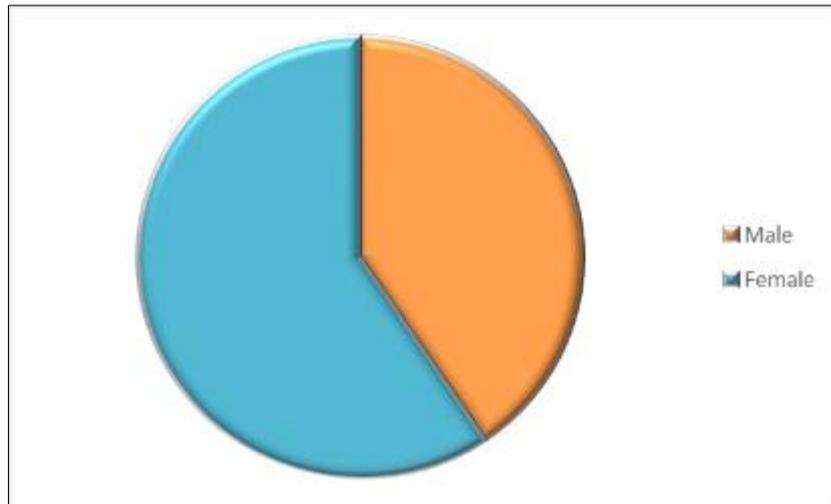
## 3. Results and discussion

The statistical program SPSS was used to examine the final data. It was established that the sample data came from a population that was regularly distributed. The data was found to be normally distributed based on skewness and kurtosis; hence, parametric statistics were employed throughout the investigation.

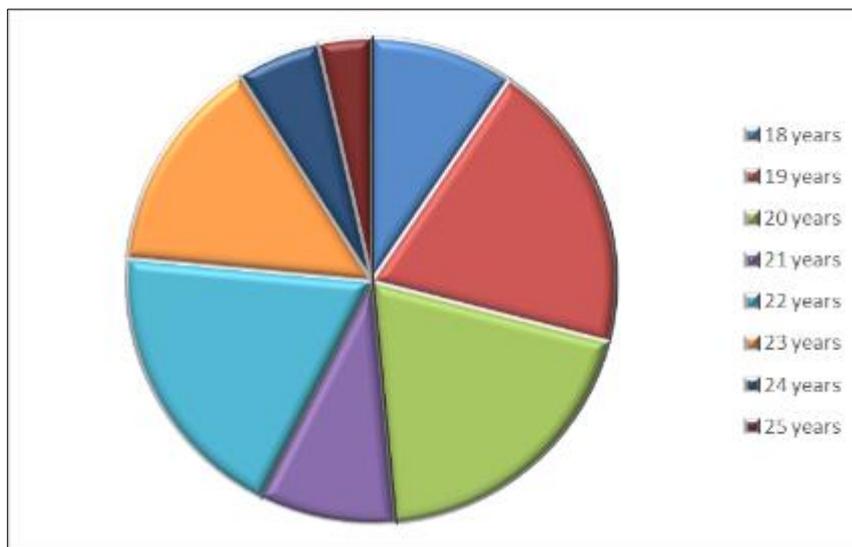
**Table 1** Socio-demographic details of the participants

	Gender	N
Age range (18-25 years)		
	Male	81
	Female	119

Table 1 shows the sociodemographic details of the participants. A total sample of 200 young adults (N=200) aged between 18- 25 years was collected in the study of which 81 were males and 119 were females.



**Figure 1** Representation of Gender



**Figure 2** Representation of Age

**Table 2** Descriptive Statistics

<b>N=200</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Social anxiety	31.19	12.528
Fear of intimacy	96.20	16.158

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation of the Social anxiety and Fear of intimacy in young adults in the age category of 18- 25 years. The total sample of the study is 200 young adults.

**Table 3** Correlation between Social anxiety and Fear of intimacy among young adults

	<b>Social anxiety</b>	<b>Fear of intimacy</b>
Social anxiety	1	0.483**
Fear of intimacy	0.483**	1

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

Table 3 shows the correlation scores of Social anxiety and Fear of intimacy among young adults. The table shows a correlation,  $r = 0.483^{**}$ , ( $p < 0.01$ ) for Social anxiety and Fear of intimacy. The  $r$  value is 0.483 which indicates that there is a significant positive correlation, which means when social anxiety increases, fear of intimacy increases in young adults and when social anxiety decreases, fear of intimacy also decreases. Hence, the null hypothesis ( $H_01$ ), there is no significant relationship between social anxiety and fear of intimacy among young adults was rejected which indicates that there is a significant relation between social anxiety and fear of intimacy among young adults.

**Table 4** Difference in scores of Social anxiety among males and female young adults

	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	SE	T	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
Social anxiety	Male	30.80	11.300	1.256	0.355	198	0.723
	Female	31.45	13.340	1.223			

Table 4 shows that there was no significant difference in the scores of social anxiety for males ( $M = 30.80$ ,  $SD = 11.300$ ) and females ( $M = 31.45$ ,  $SD = 13.340$ );  $t = 0.355$ ,  $p = 0.723$  as the  $p$ -value is less than 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis ( $H_02$ ) that there is no significant difference in social anxiety among males and females was accepted.

**Table 5** Difference in scores of Fear of intimacy among males and female young adults

	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	SE	T	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
Fear of intimacy	Male	96.54	16.875	1.441	-0.247	198	0.805
	Female	95.97	15.875	1.875			

Table 5 shows that there was no significant difference in the scores of fear of intimacy for males ( $M = 96.54$ ,  $SD = 16.875$ ) and females ( $M = 95.97$ ,  $SD = 15.875$ );  $t = .355$ ,  $p = .805$  as the  $p$ -value is less than 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis ( $H_03$ ) that there is no significant difference in social anxiety among males and females was accepted.

**Table 6** Impact of social anxiety on fear of intimacy among young adults

Variables	R	R square	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		F	Sig.
			$\beta$	SE	B			
Fear of intimacy	0.483 <sup>a</sup>	0.233	-4.856	4.706	0.483		60.309	0.000

Dependent Variable: Social Anxiety

Multiple linear regression was calculated to predict the Impact of social anxiety on fear of intimacy among young adults. According to Table 6, a significant regression equation was found,

$F = 60.309$ , ( $p < .000$ ), with an R square of 0.233. The R-square value of 0.233 indicates that approximately 22.3% of the variance in social anxiety can be explained by the fear of intimacy. The coefficient (B) for fear of intimacy is  $B = 0.483$ . This coefficient represents the change in the dependent variable (social anxiety) for a one-unit change in the independent variable (fear of intimacy), holding all other variables constant.

In this case, a one-unit increase in fear of intimacy is associated with a 0.483 unit increase in social anxiety. This positive coefficient suggests that higher levels of fear of intimacy are related to higher levels of social anxiety. Hence, the null hypothesis ( $H_04$ ) was rejected which stated that there is no impact of social anxiety on fear of intimacy among young adults.

#### 4. Discussion

The purpose of the study was to analyse the relationship between the social anxiety and fear of intimacy among young adults. The data was collected in online mode using Social interaction anxiety scale (SIAS) and Fear of Intimacy Scale (FIS). The total sample size was 200 young adults, 81 males, and 119 females within the age group of 18- 25 years

residing in the city of Bengaluru. The data was entered into Microsoft Excel and then exported into SPSS 20 for statistical analysis.

The correlation was calculated for variables Social anxiety and Fear of intimacy for 200 young adults. The Pearson correlation results showed that there was a significant positive correlation between Social anxiety and Fear of intimacy ( $r= 0.483$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Therefore, rejecting the null hypothesis ( $H_01$ ) which stated that there is no relationship between social anxiety and fear of intimacy among young adults.

An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the differences between the Social anxiety and Fear of intimacy among young adults based on gender. The results revealed that there was no significant difference in scores of social anxiety among males ( $M= 30.80$ ,  $SD= 11.300$ ) and females ( $M=31.45$ ,  $SD= 13.340$ ). Thus, the null hypothesis ( $H_02$ ) that there is no significant difference in social anxiety among males and females was accepted. It was also revealed that there was no significant difference in scores of fear of intimacy among males ( $M= 96.54$ ,  $SD=16.875$ ) and females ( $M=95.97$ ,  $SD= 15.719$ ). Thus, the null hypothesis ( $H_03$ ) that there is no significant difference in fear of intimacy among males and females was accepted.

Multiple linear regression was also conducted to check whether social anxiety have an impact on the fear of intimacy. This positive coefficient suggests that higher levels of fear of intimacy are related to higher levels of social anxiety. Therefore, the null hypothesis ( $H_04$ ) was rejected which stated that there is no impact of social anxiety on fear of intimacy among young adults.

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## 5. Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to determine how young adults' fears of intimacy and social anxiety relate to one another. Along with determining how fear of intimacy affects social anxiety, the study also sought to determine how social anxiety and fear of intimacy differ in males and females. The Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS) and the Fear of Intimacy Scale were used to gather online data from 81 males and 119 females living in the city of Bengaluru between the ages of 18 and 25. For statistical analysis, the data was first imported into Microsoft Excel and subsequently exported to SPSS 20.

The results interpreted showed the hypothesis that there is no relationships between social anxiety and fear of intimacy in young adults ( $H_01$ ) is rejected since the correlation between the two variables that was computed revealed a positive relationship. It was determined using an independent t-test whether there was a difference in social anxiety and fear of intimacy between males and females. The results accepted the hypothesis that there is no significant difference in social anxiety between males and females ( $H_02$ ); and that there is no significant difference in fear of intimacy between males and females ( $H_03$ ).

Multiple linear regression was used to analyze the relationship between social anxiety and fear of intimacy. The results showed that social anxiety affected fear of intimacy because an increase in anxiety caused a corresponding increase in social anxiety. As a result,  $H_04$  which claimed social anxiety have an impact on the fear of intimacy was rejected.

### *Limitations*

The sample was taken only from city of Bengaluru which may not represent the whole population of India. The study involved a relatively small sample population (200 participants) from a single city. Further research with larger, more diverse samples is needed. Relying solely on online surveys might not capture the full picture. In-person interaction could provide richer data.

### *Suggestions for future studies*

The study can be done including the whole population of India. Further studies can be conducted among people with other gender identities as study included only males and females. If a connection between social anxiety and fear of intimacy is established, social anxiety could be used as a predictor for fear of intimacy. This could help identify young adults at risk. By understanding the link, existing social anxiety therapies could be adapted to address fear of intimacy in young adults. This could lead to new and effective treatments.

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## Compliance with ethical standards

### *Statement of ethical approval*

The present research work does not contain any studies performed on animals.

### *Statement of informed consent*

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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