



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



## Study the relationship between fear of negative evaluation, social connectedness, loneliness among individuals who are living away from home

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### Abstract

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between fear of negative evaluation, social connectedness, and loneliness among individuals living away from their native place for education or employment. Living away from one's native place is always challenging, and individuals often face psychological problems in such situations. Fear of negative evaluation is anxiety that a person faces when he/she is evaluated negatively by other people. Social connectedness is a measure of an individual's sense of belonging and closeness, whereas loneliness is a personal feeling of isolation from the community. The research design that has been used here is a quantitative correlational research design, and the sample size for the study is 350 participants living away from their native place for the purpose of education or employment. The psychological scale that measures fear of negative evaluation, social connectedness, and loneliness is used in this study. The results showed that there was a negative correlation between fear of negative evaluation and social connectedness ( $r = -0.584, p < 0.001$ ), a positive correlation between fear of negative evaluation and loneliness ( $r = 0.482, p < 0.001$ ), and a negative correlation between social connectedness and loneliness ( $r = -0.657, p < 0.001$ ). The results of this study offered evidence to support all of the research hypotheses, and a significant relationship between fear of negative evaluation, social connectedness, and loneliness was established in the away-from-home population.

**Keywords:** Fear of negative evaluation; Social connectedness; Loneliness; Individuals living away from home

### 1. Introduction

Human beings are social in orientation and tend to seek interaction, acceptance, and validation from others. The need to belong and have significant relationships has been an important part of the development of emotional well-being and self-perception from early childhood through to adulthood. Positive social interactions have been an important part of the development of self-confidence, emotional stability, and psychological well-being. However, in today's society, the pace of social change and the increasing pressures of performance have increased individuals' concerns with their social perception. As a result, many individuals are increasingly concerned with social judgment and evaluation, which may impact their ability to form and maintain social relationships.

The increased concern with social perception may be a major contributing element in decreased confidence, the formation of social relationships, and the increased feelings of loneliness. The understanding of the interrelationship between psychological constructs such as fear of negative evaluation, social connectedness, and loneliness may offer a major insight into the emotional experiences of individuals, particularly those under academic or social pressures.

The need for acceptance has been found to be a constant need that is an integral part of human development. Experiences of attachment in early life, as well as experiences of attachment in adolescence and adulthood, are also thought to influence the individual's experiences of self and others. Social expectations, emotion regulation, and self-

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perception are commonly influenced by early experiences of acceptance or rejection. In today's world, the role of social comparison and observation has been significantly facilitated, and this can further increase the individual's concerns about evaluation by others.

Fear of negative evaluation, social connection, and loneliness are all distinct psychological constructs. However, they are also interrelated. Fear of negative evaluation is defined as the anxiety that individuals experience when they think that they are going to be negatively evaluated by others. Experience of social connection entails a sense of belongingness and emotional intimacy with others.

Loneliness can be described as a personal emotional experience that arises when there is a mismatch between the kind of social relationships individuals want and what they actually have (Perlman & Peplau, 1981).

### **1.1. Fear of Negative Evaluation**

The concept of fear of negative evaluation is defined as the apprehension or anxiety that people experience in situations where they think that they may be negatively evaluated by other people. This concept of fear is not only applicable in situations like exams and job interviews but may also occur in everyday social interactions. The people suffering from a high degree of fear of negative evaluation may become overly concerned with the idea of making mistakes and becoming incompetent and rejected by people in general. The concept of fear of negative evaluation is related to social anxiety and may increase in situations where there is a lot of emphasis on performance. The people suffering from the concept of fear of negative evaluation may avoid social interactions altogether or may take part in them with a great deal of discomfort. Even in situations where they take part in social interactions, they may show a great deal of hesitation in their communication.

According to cognitive perspectives, persons with fear of negative evaluation are likely to exhibit negative thinking styles, such as overgeneralization, catastrophizing, and mind-reading. They often assume that others are judging them negatively, even in situations where no actual evaluation is taking place (Clark & Wells, 1995; Beck & Clark, 1997).

Fear of negative evaluation is linked with self-esteem and self-image concepts. For instance, persons with negative self-beliefs are likely to exhibit negative evaluation fears from others. The emotional response of the persons with fear of negative evaluation may include feelings of embarrassment, shame, and self-consciousness. In addition, physiological responses, such as increased heart rate, sweating, and muscle tension, may be experienced in situations perceived as evaluation situations. The avoidance of social interactions in order to reduce negative evaluation fears may limit the opportunities for communication skill development.

### **1.2. Social Connectedness**

Social connectedness is the degree to which an individual perceives that they are emotionally connected to others and have a sense of meaningful relationships. This is an important aspect because it is not based on the number of interactions an individual may have with others but is based on the quality and emotional connection that an individual may have with others.

Individuals that have high levels of social connection have been found to have high levels of psychological well-being and satisfaction with life. Social connections have also been found to play a role in providing emotional support to individuals that are in stressful situations. Belongingness has also been found to have a link to good mental health outcomes. People who feel more connected to others usually tend to experience fewer emotional difficulties, are able to deal with stressful situations more effectively, and generally have a more positive view of themselves (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2009). Significant social connections have been found to develop through feelings of trust, empathy, and understanding. This can develop through relationships with family groups, friends, or educational groups. Additionally, culture and society may also have a role to play in the experience of social connectedness. This could be through family groups within society, or individual choice and relationships.

Transitions in life, such as moving to a new location, moving from one academic institution to another, or getting used to a new kind of social environment, may lead to the disruption of the existing social connections of an individual. In such cases, the individual may find it hard to make new connections with people, as well as achieve emotional closeness with people. For an individual facing fear of negative evaluation, the task of making connections may be extremely hard.

### **1.3. Loneliness**

Loneliness is a human feeling that is subjective in nature. It is associated with the perceived discrepancy between the kind of relationships people desire and the kind of relationships people experience. Although there is a perceived link between loneliness and social isolation, the two concepts are different in nature. Social isolation is associated with a lack of social interactions, while loneliness is associated with the subjective feeling of being isolated from other people.

The effects of loneliness may result in a negative impact on the psychological and physical health of an individual. For instance, an individual experiencing loneliness may develop emotional problems and may also feel that the individual is being misunderstood and isolated from other people.

The human feeling of loneliness is a common feeling experienced by people in transition. For instance, transitions may include an individual moving to a new environment, an individual joining a new school or college, and an individual getting used to a new environment. Transitions may result in a negative impact on an individual's social roles and relationships. For example, loneliness may lead to a situation whereby an individual finds it hard to form a positive relationship with others.

Fear of negative evaluation, social connectedness, and loneliness are psychological states that have a relationship with each other and are important in determining the social behavior of an individual. An individual with fear of negative evaluation may not have the guts to take part in social interactions and express his or her opinions; thus, the individual may not have the opportunity to develop social connections. The reduced chances of forming significant social relationships with other people may reduce the social connectedness of these people. The reduced social connectedness may, in turn, lead to loneliness. However, loneliness may increase the fear of negative evaluation in these people, as they become more sensitive about being evaluated negatively by other people in the social setting. This may lead to a cycle in which the fear of negative evaluation reduces the chances of forming significant social relationships with other people, the reduced chances of forming significant social relationships reduce social connectedness, and the reduced social connectedness increases loneliness.

Such factors may be especially pertinent for persons living outside their native location for the sake of education or job obligations. Leaving the familiar setting may require persons to acculturate into new social/cultural surroundings. In the process of acculturation, persons may experience ambiguity in relation-building and new social circles.

Living away from home is a major change that impacts the emotional and social lives of the individual. Living away from home provides an opportunity for the individual to develop and grow. On the other hand, it also creates challenges such as loneliness, ambiguity of social behavior, and difficulties in developing meaningful relationships.

In recent times, the phenomenon of loneliness has become a common factor for people adapting to a new environment. Furthermore, the fear of negative evaluation may also influence the social interactions and building of relationships for an individual. Social connectedness may also influence the phenomenon of loneliness. It is very much evident that the phenomenon of loneliness has been identified as an important psychological factor, and it is also very much evident that a number of researchers have attempted to explore the phenomenon of fear of negative evaluation, social connectedness, and loneliness as individual factors. However, it is equally important to explore the interrelationship between the above factors. It is very much evident that individuals who are far from their families, like students and young working professionals, may encounter a number of social and psychological challenges. Therefore, it is imperative to explore the interrelationship between the above factors in order to understand the psychological adaptation of the individual.

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## **2. Materials and Methods**

### **2.1. Research design**

The present study used a quantitative correlational research design to investigate the relationship between fear of negative evaluation, social connectedness, and loneliness in people who live away from their native place in pursuit of education or employment. A correlational research design was considered suitable for the present study as the researcher intended to explore the nature and extent of the relationship that may or may not exist between the research variables. For the present study, standardised psychological scales were used to assess the research variables.

## **2.2. Participants**

The participants of the present study consisted of 350 participants who were living away from their native place for the purpose of education and employment. The participants of the study consisted of male and female participants, and the age group of the participants varied from 18 to 25 years. The sampling technique adopted for the present study was the purposive sampling technique. The researcher adopted this technique for the present study as the study was specific in nature. The sample consisted of individuals from different educational and employment backgrounds. Some of the participants were students who came to attain higher education, while others were employed. The composition of the sample was such that it could assess the psychological state of young adults who live away from their native place, especially in terms of fear of negative evaluation, social connectedness, and loneliness.

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## **3. Materials and Instruments**

### **3.1. Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale**

This scale is used to measure the level of fear or apprehension that a person develops in relation to how he or she is evaluated or assessed by other people in society. This tool was created for the purpose of self-reporting, and it was developed by (Leary, 1983). The tool has a total of 12 questions, which have been used in measuring the level of concern that a person develops in relation to criticisms, rejections, or evaluations of behaviour by other people in society. The questions developed in relation to this tool have been rated on a scale of 5, ranging from 1, which means "Not at all characteristic of me," to 5, which means "Extremely characteristic of me." High consistency was noted in relation to this tool, as indicated by a high value of Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which ranges from 0.90 to 0.94. Construct validity was noted in relation to this tool, considering its high correlation to other tools developed for the purpose of measuring social anxiety.

### **3.2. Social Connectedness Scale Revised (SCS-R)**

The scale created by Lee, Draper, and Lee (2001) helps to understand how strongly a person feels connected to others and how much they experience closeness and a sense of belonging in their social life. The SCS-R has 20 items that focus on the measurement of feelings of emotional connections as well as feelings of belonging in a particular society in the world. The response category of the SCS-R ranges from 1 to 6, which is a Likert-type response category ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." The higher the score, the higher the level of social connectedness, whereas the lower the score, the lower the level of social connectedness, which generates feelings of disconnection in the life of an individual. The SCS-R is highly reliable, as indicated by the alpha coefficient ranging from 0.91 to 0.94, whereas it has also been found to be highly valid, as indicated by the correlation of the SCS-R with other variables such as well-being, support, and loneliness.

### **3.3. The UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3)**

The UCLA Loneliness Scale Version 3 was developed by Daniel W. Russell in 1996. This scale consists of 20 questions and is used for measuring feelings of loneliness or perceived social isolation that an individual experiences. The response given by individuals for the UCLA Loneliness Scale is measured on a Likert scale with a range of 1 (Never) to 4 (Often).

The scores obtained by the individuals in the UCLA Loneliness Scale indicate that the feelings of loneliness or perceived social isolation experienced by the individuals are at a higher level. The UCLA Loneliness Scale has been found to possess a higher level of reliability, as the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients range from 0.89 to 0.94. The construct validity of the UCLA Loneliness Scale has been established, as the scores obtained by the individuals in the UCLA Loneliness Scale relate to other variables.

### **3.4. Procedure**

The present study has been conducted with the aim of exploring the relationship between fear of negative evaluation, social connectedness, and loneliness in people who are away from their native place in the name of education or employment. The participants were informed about the aim and objective of the present study. They were also informed that their information will be kept on a confidential basis. Informed consent was obtained from the participants before their participation.

Participants who met the inclusion criteria for the present study were selected using the purposive sampling technique. Data collection for the study was conducted from 350 participants who are away from their native place. The data collection tool used for the present study is questionnaires.

The subjects were asked to read all the statements carefully and answer them honestly based on their own experiences. After obtaining the necessary data, the responses were arranged to prepare them for statistical analysis. The data collected in the research were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to calculate the descriptive and Pearson correlation analysis for the study variables.

### 3.5. Statistical analysis

The data collected in the research were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The descriptive statistics, such as mean and standard deviation were employed to describe the participants scores for variables. Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis was employed to determine the relationship between fear of negative evaluation, social connectedness, and loneliness. The level of importance for the statistics was set at  $p < 0.05$ . However, the level of importance that was actually obtained was  $p < 0.001$ , which shows a very strong connection between the statistical variables. The statistical variables have a relationship with each other.

### 3.6. Ethical considerations

The study was conducted by adhering to general ethical principles that can be applied to psychological research. Before the participants took part in the research, they were given a brief description of the nature of the research and what would be involved in the research. They were also told that participation in the research was completely voluntary and that their consent was sought for their participation in the research. They were also told that they were free to withdraw from the research at any time without any obligation.

Here throughout the research process confidentiality was maintained with the participants. There was no collection of personal identifying information, and all the responses were anonymous and for academic purposes only. The questionnaires employed in the study were designed to ensure that there was no sensitive or harmful information that could cause discomfort to the participants.

Moreover, all the collected data was stored in a safe manner and was only accessible to the researcher. All possible measures were taken to ensure that the dignity and confidentiality of the participants were maintained.

## 4. Results

**Table 1** Descriptive statistics

Variable	M	SD	N
Fear of negative evaluation	2.95	0.41	350
Social connectedness	3.62	0.52	350
Loneliness	2.46	0.35	350

This shows the mean and standard deviation for the variables fear of negative evaluation, social connectedness and loneliness were calculated using descriptive statistics.

This table presents the mean and standard deviation for the variables with a total sample of 350. For fear of negative evaluation, the mean score was 2.95 with a standard deviation of 0.41. Social connectedness, the mean score was 3.62 with a standard deviation of 0.52. Loneliness, the mean score was 2.46 with a standard deviation of 0.35 among individuals who are away from home.

Pearson correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship between fear of negative evaluation, social connectedness and loneliness among individuals who are away from home.

The results showed that fear of negative evaluation is negatively correlated with social connectedness,  $r = -0.584$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Hence, individuals scoring higher in Fear of Negative Evaluation are associated with lower scores in social connectedness. The results showed fear of negative evaluation is positively correlated with loneliness,  $r = 0.482$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Participants who reported a higher fear of negative evaluation from others reported higher levels of loneliness. Also found social connectedness to be significantly negatively correlated with loneliness,  $r = -0.657$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Individuals who rated themselves as having more social connectedness in their lives tended to rate themselves as being less lonely. The results of the study provided support for all of the research hypotheses, and a statistically significant

relationship between fear of negative evaluation, social connectedness and loneliness in the away-from-home population was found.

**Table 2** Correlation analysis

		<b>Fear of negative evaluation</b>	<b>Social connectedness</b>	<b>Loneliness</b>
Fear of negative evaluation	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.584***	0.482***
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<0.001	<0.001
	N	350	350	350
Social connectedness	Pearson Correlation	-0.584***	1	-0.657***
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<0.001		<0.001
	N	350	350	350
Loneliness	Pearson Correlation	0.482***	-0.657***	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<0.001	<0.001	
	N	350	350	350

\*\*\*Correlation is significant at the level of 0.001(2- tailed)

## 5. Discussion

The present study examined the relationship between fear of negative evaluation, social connectedness, loneliness among individuals who are away from home. The results revealed that there is a significant relationship among all the three variables and this provides empirical support for the proposed research hypotheses.

A significant negative correlation exists between the variables fear of negative evaluation and social connectedness. This implies that individuals who have high fear of negative evaluation tend to have low levels of social connectedness. Individuals who have high fear of negative evaluation may be reluctant to get involved with other people, hence may not have high feelings of belongingness.

There was also a significant positive relationship between fear of negative evaluation and loneliness. This is where the person who had the most fear of negative evaluation had the most feelings of loneliness. Fear of negative evaluation can cause an individual to avoid people and express themselves less. To an individual who is far from home, this can have a greater effect on them since they are likely to have less social support and thus experience more loneliness.

There was a negative relationship between social connectedness and loneliness. This is where human beings need to have social connectedness with one another. For example, individuals who had the most social connectedness in a new place had the least feelings of loneliness.

At the same time, this study has also highlighted the need to understand the psychological problems that people face in their lives when they migrate for their educational and professional purposes. Such migration also includes adapting oneself to new environments, cultures, and social relations. People who experience feelings of belongingness in their social environment are not likely to experience feelings of loneliness even if they are migrated to different places from their home.

Such findings have also highlighted the need to provide a safe and social environment in the context of education and professional life. Such a need can be fulfilled by promoting peer relations in order to reduce feelings of negative evaluation and loneliness in people who have migrated from their home.

## 6. Conclusion

The results obtained in this study reveal the importance of the relationship between fear of negative evaluation, social connectedness, and loneliness for individuals living outside their native place.

Individuals living in society with a high level of fear of negative evaluation tend to have a low level of social connectedness. This reveals that fear of negative evaluation has a significant impact on the relationships of the individual.

Individuals living in society with a high level of fear of negative evaluation tend to have a high level of loneliness. This reveals that fear of negative evaluation causes loneliness in the individual.

The negative correlation between social connectedness and loneliness reveals that individuals living outside their native place and having a high level of social connectedness tend to have a low level of loneliness.

The results obtained in this study reveal that the research hypotheses are valid and that social connectedness and emotional support are significant for individuals living outside their native place.

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## Compliance with ethical standards

### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

The author of this research makes a declaration that there is no conflict of interest in the publication of this research.

### *Statement of ethical approval*

The research was carried out in a manner that adheres to the guidelines of conducting research among human beings. The research was carried out in a manner that is fair and just for individuals who participate in this research. The research among the participants was carried out in consideration of the guidelines of ethical principles.

### *Statement of informed consent*

Informed consent was obtained from all the participants before they could take part in the research. The participants were made aware of the objectives of the research and were free to take part or not.

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