



## Predictors of Social Anxiety in College Students

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### ABSTRACT.

This study discusses the phenomenon of social anxiety among college students as part of their life journey in facing social pressures in the campus environment. As individuals undergoing the transition to early adulthood, students are confronted with increasing social demands as they age. Social anxiety, characterized by fear of negative evaluation from others, can hinder their social development, leading to isolation and fear of interaction. Factors such as loneliness, sensitivity to rejection, and negative self-perception have been shown to be significant predictors in the emergence of social anxiety. Through a literature analysis over the past decade, this study identifies that the escalation of social anxiety among students can be influenced by various internal and external variables, such as self-esteem, social support, and family experience. The implications of these findings indicate the need for appropriate interventions to reduce the negative impact of social anxiety on students, which can affect their overall well-being.

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### Background

As individuals grow older, social demands or expectations also increase. Young adults face more complex situations compared to their teenage years (Santrock, 2018; Thahir, 2018). University students, who are in the early adulthood phase or often referred to as young adults, belong to this group (Purnasari & Sri Muliati A., 2018). During this stage, they focus on preparing for their future, whether it is something they have planned or something unforeseen. This preparation involves phase of life. However, not all personal and social expectations can be met during this process. The campus environment and student life often add to the pressure. High expectations, academic competition, the pressure to perform publicly, or social stigma can all contribute to heightened social anxiety among students.

Social anxiety refers to the fear or discomfort of being around people in certain setting. This anxiety stems from worry or fear about how others perceive us (Bafadal, 2021). Individuals experiencing social anxiety often deal with negative emotions like fear, overthinking, and excessive worry about things that have not even happened yet. This can lead them to avoid social interactions altogether. Physically, social anxiety can manifest in symptoms such as a racing heartbeat, cold sweats, nausea, and rapid breathing. People with social anxiety often feel intense negativity, believing they are being closely judge by those around them, especially if they fail to meet societal expectations like graduating on time, losing a job, or being unemployed for an extended period (NHS inform, 2021).

If left untreated, social anxiety can escalate into social anxiety disorder. Those suffering from this condition often isolate themselves in their rooms to avoid any interaction with others, which can severely disrupt their lives (Ramaiah, 2003). Emotional disorders, including symptoms of anxiety and depression, have been steadily increasing. According to a survey, seven out of every thousand households have family members with mental health issues, contributing to a total of 450,000 people with mental health disorders in that year (Tim Riskesdas, 2018). Anxiety can lead to behaviors such as avoiding learning from mistakes, clinging to immature desires for security and more broadly, failing to learn from life experiences (Feist & Feist, 2010). University students, as young adults, are particularly vulnerable to unmanaged social anxiety. Many students, especially those living far from home, believe they can handle their issues independently but often struggle without support (Ajhuri, 2019). The effects of social anxiety can be severe and disruptive, especially when it progresses into a disorder.

Social anxiety can hinder personal growth, particularly in social aspects. Students with social anxiety often avoid interactions and isolate themselves in their rooms to avoid meeting others (Atikah & Savira, 2023). Menurut Hastuti & Hardew (2024), a pre-study on 30 university students revealed that 25 of them experienced significant social anxiety that interfered with their activities. Symptoms included avoiding class presentations, refusing to express opinions during lectures, and feeling anxious, nervous, and sweaty when speaking in public. This clearly disrupts their daily lives. As social beings, university students constantly face social situations, whether in the spotlight in performance settings or during casual interactions on and off-campus (APA, 2003).

Bandura's cognitive theory (1971) explains that social anxiety is closely tied to cognitive processes and learning experiences. Students may develop social anxiety by learning to feel anxious or fearful in certain social situations through social learning. Key concepts from Bandura's theory include observational learning, which shows that individuals can learn behaviors by observing and imitating others. For instance, students might develop social anxiety by mimicking friends, family members, or public figures who exhibit anxious behaviors in social settings. Another concept is reinforcements, which highlights how positive or negative feedback can shape learning experiences. If someone faces rejections or criticism in social interactions, it can reinforce their social anxiety in the future. Finally, perception and evaluation play a role, as individuals form beliefs about their abilities to handle certain social situations, like feeling insecure during a class presentation, which can heighten their social anxiety.

Based on Bandura's theory, social anxiety arises due to various predictive factors. This literature review aims to gather and analyze data on predictors of social anxiety among university students. The study provides an in-depth analysis and summary of recent findings, addressing a gap in previous research. By exploring studies from the last decade, this review aims to identify the key variables contributing to social anxiety in students.

## Methods

This study employs a literature review approach, gathering data and scholarly works relevant to the central topic, which are variables that predict social anxiety. The studies selected for this review focus on university students as the target population. The literature review was conducted for three main reasons. First is the research question can only be addressed through a review of existing literature and cannot be answered through field data collection, second is this type of literature study has not been conducted before, making it a potential reference for preliminary research, and the last is the data gathered through this review remains reliable for addressing the research problem.

Data was collected by exploring various journals, articles, and other sources relevant to the research topic. This review examines both international and national journals from the past ten years to gain insights into the progress of research in this area and understand how the topic has evolved over the last decade. Identifying gaps between past and recent studies provides a solid foundation for future research while enhancing the quality of this review. Additionally, the review offers a comprehensive overview of the research topic.

## Result

The findings are based on 11 journal articles that focus on university students as subjects, specifically examining predictors that influence social anxiety.

Table 1. The summary of these articles is presented

No	Peneliti	Judul	Hasil Temuan
1	Panayiotou, et al. (2014)	Direct and Indirect Predictors of Social Anxiety: The Role of Anxiety Sensitivity, Behavioral Inhibition, Experiential Avoidance and Self-Consciousness	- The variable that can predict social anxiety is anxiety sensitivity
2	Lim, et al. (2016)	Loneliness Over Time: The Crucial Role of Anxiety.	- Research findings indicate that loneliness positively predicts social anxiety in the future over a specific period
3	Eren, Lim, dan Bates (2023)	Loneliness and Social Anxiety in Young Adults: The Moderating and Mediating Roles of Emotion Dysregulation, Depression and Social Isolation Risk	- Loneliness is the primary predictor of social anxiety. - Research findings show that students who feel lonely tend to experience higher levels of social anxiety.
4	Lin & Fan (2023)	The Relationship Between Rejection Sensitivity and Social Anxiety Among Chinese College Students: The Mediating Roles Of Loneliness And Self-Esteem	- Research found that rejection sensitivity can predict the emergence of social anxiety in university students. - Students with high rejection sensitivity tend to experience higher levels of social anxiety compared to those with low rejection sensitivity
5	Liao, et al. (2023)	The Effect of Appearance Anxiety on Social Anxiety among College Students: Sequential Mediating Effect Of self-Efficacy and Self-Esteem	- This study revealed that performance anxiety plays a significant role in the development of social anxiety among Chinese university students.
6	Fatima, et al.	Relationship between Self-Esteem and	- Self-esteem is a significant negative predictor of social

(2017)		Social Anxiety: Role of Social Connectedness as a Mediator		anxiety, indicating that individuals with higher self-esteem tend to have lower levels of social anxiety.
7	Wan, et al. (2024)	The Effect of Negative Physical Self on Social Anxiety in College Students: The Bidirectional Chain Mediation Roles of Fear of Negative Evaluation and Regulatory Emotional Self-Efficacy	-	Negative physical self consistently predict of social anxiety. According to self-discrepancy theory, when there is a mismatch between an individuals actual self and their ideal self, it leads to painful feelings and social anxiety.
8	Dugyala & Poyrazli (2021)	Social Anxiety, Depression, Coping Self-Efficacy, and Coping Strategies among College Students	-	Gender and self-blame are important predictors of social anxiety. - This research discusses the transition of university students from school life to higher education and the social challenges they face.
9	Rose & Kocovski (2020)	The Social Self-Compassion Scale (SSCS): Development, Validity, and Associations with Indices of Well-Being, Distress, and Social Anxiety.	-	The study identified scales capable of predicting social anxiety, namely the Social Self-Compassion Scale (SSCS) and the Self-Compassion Scale. Both scales address self-compassion, which refers to being kind and understanding toward oneself when facing life challenges such as suffering, failure, or personal imperfections.
10	Cheng, Zhang, Ding (2014)	Self-Esteem and Fear of Negative Evaluation as Mediators between Family Socioeconomic Status and Social Anxiety in Chinese Emerging Adults.	-	The finding indicate that students from families with lower socioeconomic status are more likely to experience higher levels of social anxiety.
11	Yu, et al. (2019)	Effect of Parent-Child Attachment on College Students' Social Anxiety: A Moderated Mediation Model	-	According to this study, students who grew up in environments with poor parent-child relationships are likely to have learned maladaptive social responses early on and tend to adopt unhealthy interpersonal patterns when interacting with others.

## Discussion

University students with social anxiety often perceive their anxiety as something inherently frightening. A study by Panayiotou, et al. (2014) identified anxiety sensitivity as a significant predictors of social anxiety. Students examined in this study tended to avoid or struggle to accept unpleasant experiences. They often focused their attention inward, and the research highlighted a correlation between social anxiety and self-consciousness, suggesting that self-focused attention serves as a mechanism for avoiding distressing experiences.

Lim, et al. (2016) defined social anxiety as an ambiguous fear or worry about social situations or interactions with others. Their findings indicated that loneliness positively predicts future social anxiety over specific periods they also noted that loneliness is dynamic and can change over time, emphasizing how social anxiety might follow these changes. The study underlined that understanding loneliness as a predictor could help students both identify and manage their social anxiety, ultimately reducing feelings of isolation.

Similarly Eren, Lim, dan Bates (2023) identified loneliness as a primary predictor of social anxiety. According to their study, university students are in an age group particularly vulnerable to mental health issues, especially during life transitions like starting college. The results show that students who feel lonelier are more likely to experience higher levels of social anxiety. Furthermore, the study found that emotional dysregulation and depression act as mediators in the relationship between loneliness and social anxiety, while the risk of social isolation serves as a moderator. This underscores the complex interaction of psychological factors, including emotional dysregulation, depression, and social isolation risks.

Students with social anxiety often fear negative judgment from others, feel pressured in social settings, and avoid social situations. In university environments, however, communication and interpersonal interaction are essential, making these fears detrimental to academic achievement and mental health, this fear of judgment, termed rejection sensitivity, can exacerbate social anxiety. A study by Lin & Fan (2023) revealed that rejection sensitivity predicts social anxiety among students. Those with high rejection sensitivity are more likely to experience elevated social anxiety compared to their peers with lower sensitivity.

Among Chinese university students, social anxiety is a significant psychological issue Liao, et al. (2023) found that performance anxiety plays a pivotal role in the development of social anxiety in this group, their study shows that performance anxiety significantly predicts social anxiety, both directly and

indirectly. Indirectly, it operates through three mediating pathways is self-efficacy, self-esteem, and the sequential mediation of self-efficacy and self-esteem.

Unlike previous studies where self-esteem was a mediating variable, Fatima, et al. (2017) identified self-esteem as a significant negative predictor of social anxiety. They explained that students with higher self-esteem feel more comfortable in social environments and are better at building strong social connections. These students rarely fear judgment from others regarding their skills, actions, or statements. The research also found that social anxiety is more prevalent in men than women and emphasized the importance of interventions targeting self-esteem and social connectedness to reduce social anxiety among students.

Another predictor identified in earlier studies is negative physical self-perception, where individuals consciously feel dissatisfied with their physical appearance. Wan, et al. (2024) found that students with high social anxiety also fear negative evaluations of their appearance, believing they are physically inadequate. This variable consistently predicts social anxiety. According to self-discrepancy theory, a mismatch between an individual's actual self and their ideal self results in painful feelings and social anxiety. As self-awareness develops, students tend to focus on their appearance in social contexts and for subjective ideals of their desired physical image. This variable is closely related to performance anxiety, as described by Liao, et al. (2023) both emphasizing the role of physical appearance in triggering anxiety.

Dugyala & Poyrazli (2021) identified gender and self-blame as significant predictors of social anxiety. Their research discusses the transition from high school to university and the social challenges students face. Similar to Eren, Lim, Bates (2023) the study highlights that students in this age group are more vulnerable to social challenges that may trigger social anxiety. Self-blame, defined as an individual's tendency to blame themselves for negative events or unpleasant situations, is often a maladaptive coping mechanism that contributes to psychological issues, including social anxiety.

Rose & Kocovski (2020) identified the Social Self-Compassion Scale (SSCS) and the Self-Compassion Scale as tools for predicting social anxiety. These scales explore self-compassion, which involves being kind and understanding toward oneself during life's challenges, such as suffering, failure, or personal imperfections. The study highlights three core components of self-compassion: self-kindness (treating oneself warmly instead of harshly during difficulties), common humanity (recognizing that suffering and imperfection are universal human experiences), and mindfulness (maintaining balance in responding to negative thoughts and emotions without overreacting or ignoring them).

In addition to internal predictors, family socioeconomic status is another external factor influencing social anxiety. Cheng, Zhang, Ding (2014) explored this variable and found that low family socioeconomic status is associated with higher levels of social anxiety among Chinese university students. The study also identified two mediators: self-esteem and fear of negative evaluation. Another external predictor is the parent-child relationship. Yu, et al. (2019) found that poor parent-child relationships negatively predict social anxiety among students. The research explains that students who grow up in such environments learn maladaptive social challenges models early on, leading to unhealthy interpersonal patterns later in life. These challenges often persist, straining their social interactions both in childhood and during university.

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