Impact of social anxiety on the life style of students

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Abstract

Social anxiety is a persistent mental health issue characterized by unreasonable anxiety during social interactions. Everyday encounters, on the other hand, create severe anxiety, self-consciousness, and embarrassment among people who suffer from social anxiety. It is different from shyness. Shyness can make socializing, school, and work difficult, but it does not disrupt life to the same level as social anxiety. In social anxiety, fear and anxiety lead to avoidance, disrupting one's life. It is persistent and overwhelming and may affect relationships, daily routines, work, school, or other everyday activities. The objectives of the study were to find out the prevalence of social anxiety among students and to find out the impact of social anxiety on the lifestyle of students. The study was conducted on 198 numbers of college going students having age group of 19-21 years. Two questionnaires were used for data collection. The responses were coded and analysed. Results showed that higher percentage of students from first year (42.8%) was found to have a high level of social anxiety as compared to the students of other grades. It was also found that all the different variables of social anxiety (fear, avoidance, physiological arousal, poor communication, and poor confidence) contribute significantly on life style of the students at $p<0.05$ the level of significance. Social anxiety can lead to harmful effects on various aspects of life, including interpersonal relationships, academic achievements, emotional well-being, and future career prospects. So one should properly address these kind of consequences. By engaging in careful preparation and comprehending the distinct impacts it has on students, educators can establish a welcoming atmosphere that facilitates learning and development of all students.

Key words: Social anxiety, prevalence, self conscious.

Introduction

According to World Health Organization mental health is a condition of psychological well being which makes people allow to identify their own capabilities, allow to develop the skill to deal with the usual stresses of life, to involve themselves in a creative and fruitful work and can build useful contribution to their community. It assists individual to make decision, social interaction and to perceive things. Anxiety is condition of mental health which is comprises of feeling of worry, fear and edginess. According to American Psychological Association anxiety is a sentiment characterized by feelings of tension, anxious thoughts, and somatic changes like increased blood pressure. Social anxiety is a mental health disease characterised by a panic of being noticed by other or negatively judge by others. Social anxiety also known as social phobia in which people having fear of any social situation (Bhattachrjee *et al.*,2023). Everyday encounters, on the other hand, create severe anxiety, self consciousness, and embarrassment among people who suffer from social anxiety. Contrary to shyness, social anxiety goes beyond mere difficulties in socializing, school, and work. It significantly disrupts one's daily life on a greater scale.(Bhattacharjee, 2023). The difference between social phobia and social anxiety disorder (SAD) primarily lies in their chronology, with social phobia being the former term and SAD being the current term for the same issue. The official psychiatric diagnosis of social phobia was first introduced in the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-III) in 1980. At that time, social phobia was defined as a fear specifically related to performance situations and did not encompass fears of less formal situations such as casual conversations or initial encounters with others. In 1994, the DSM-IV was published, replacing the term social phobia with social anxiety disorder (SAD). This new terminology was employed to reflect the broader and more generalized nature of fears associated with that particular condition. In this new edition, social anxiety was defined as a "marked and persistent fear of one or more social or performance situations in which the person is

exposed to unfamiliar people or possible scrutiny by others." The diagnostic criteria were only slightly modified from the DSM-III-R.

The fear that people with social anxiety have in social situations is so intense that they feel it is beyond their control. This fear might hinder some people from going to work, attending school, or conducting their daily activities while some people may be able to perform these tasks, but they do it with significant fear or anxiety. People with social anxiety may worry about engaging in social situations for weeks before it happened. They might end up avoiding situations or locations that make them feel uncomfortable or embarrassed. Some people do not experience anxiety during social interactions, but rather during performances- when they deliver a speech, participate in a sporting event, or play a musical instrument live. A person with social anxiety can have a mild, moderate, or extreme form of it. There are people with social anxiety who only have symptoms in one kind of situation, such as eating in front of others or performing in front of others, though there are also individuals with social anxiety who experience symptoms in numerous or all forms of social interaction.

According to epidemiological studies, social anxiety is among the most widespread mental disorders, yet often goes undetected and untreated for a long time, negatively affecting a person's marriage and social life throughout adulthood. Adolescent social anxiety appears to negatively impact academic performance, peer interactions, and hobbies. According to a number of studies, social anxiety is linked to poor academic performance, academic failure, and early school dropout in adolescence. This may have long-lasting detrimental effects on a person's professional, marriage, and social spheres throughout their lifetime. According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA), approximately 15 million American adults have social anxiety. Symptoms of this disorder may start around the age of 13. The incidence of social anxiety among school-aged teenagers differed from nation to nation. For instance, the magnitude varies from 3.5 percent to 21 percent in high-income countries. Even though there is little evidence, the currently available literature suggests that social anxiety is more common, with rates ranging from 10.3 percent to 27 percent.

The lifestyle of an individual or a group refers to the unique set of living conditions, behaviours, and habits that are characteristic of them or that they have consciously chosen. The impact of lifestyle factors on both physical and mental health is significant. In contemporary affluent societies, diseases with high mortality rates, such as cardiovascular disorders, obesity, diabetes, and cancer, are largely influenced by lifestyle choices. The four key lifestyle factors of smoking, physical activity, alcohol intake, and diet have a substantial effect on mortality rates, and even minor variations in lifestyle can have a significant impact on overall health status (Khaw *et al.,* 2008). It is important to recognize that lifestyle choices can greatly influence an individual's physical and mental well-being. Certain lifestyle factors have the potential to directly affect brain chemistry and contribute to the development of mental illnesses. In the modern era, mental illnesses are recognized as genuine health concerns. By adopting healthy lifestyle choices and utilizing appropriate treatment options, individuals can effectively improve their mental health. Good mental health not only provides a sense of well-being and inner strength, but also enables individuals to enjoy life and effectively cope with challenges.

Promoting a healthy lifestyle can have positive effects on mental health. By identifying and implementing healthy lifestyle choices that enhance mental well-being and reduce psychological problems, it is possible to prevent the onset of major psychiatric disorders. Therefore, it is crucial to prioritize healthy lifestyle options that promote mental well-being in order to mitigate the prevalence of significant mental health issues.

Research Design

A cross-sectional research design was adopted for conducting the present study. Cross sectional research study is a type of research design in which data are collected from many different individuals at a given point of time. In this research study variables are observed without influencing them. Cross-sectional research design is used in numerous disciplines such as medicine, epidemiology, psychology, economics and social sciences. This study is a cross-sectional study as it aims to examine the prevalence of social anxiety among specific group of students within the total students and to find out the impact of social anxiety on the lifestyle of students.

Materials and Method

The research was conducted in Hnahthial District, located in Mizoram, India. To make sure a representative sample a multi-stage sampling procedure was utilized. Initially, Hnahthial District was chosen through simple random sampling. In second stage, the researcher purposively selected the Hnahthial R.D. Block and in third stage one college was selected using purposive sampling method. Total 198 students were selected from the total population by applying a sample size determination formula. For data collection two questionnaire were developed with well defined section for gathering information on their area of interest, one is self modified tool for social anxiety and another is self-constructed

tool for life style. The self-modified tool for social anxiety comprised two sections: demographic characteristics and a questionnaire on social anxiety. The questionnaire on social anxiety assessed five variables, including fear, avoidance, physiological arousal, poor communication, and poor confidence. Each statement was rated using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," with scores of 1 to 5 assigned respectively for positive items and reversed scores of 5 to 1 assigned for negative statements. The total score of each subscale was obtained by summing the scores of its corresponding items. Overall, there were a total of thirty items included in this assessment instrument. The self constructed questionnaire on lifestyle encompassed four distinct domains: the physical domain, social domain, emotional domain, and intellectual domain. Each statement in the questionnaire was rated using a five-point Likert scale. This scale ranged from "never" to "always," with corresponding scores of 1 to 5 for positive items and reversed scoring (scores of 5 to 1) for negative statements. The total score for each subscale was computed by summing up the scores obtained from both positive and negative items separately.

Results and Discussion

This section deals with the prevalence of social anxiety among students and the impact of social anxiety on the lifestyle of students.

Table 1. social anxiety levels of the respondents in relation to educational standards

Standards	Levels of Social anxiety					
	High (n=49)		Moderate (n=112)		Low (n=37)	
	F	P	F	P	F	P
1st Year	**21**	**42.8**	35	31.2	10	27.1
2nd Year	16	32.7	38	33.9	12	32.4
3rd Year	12	24.5	39	34.9	15	40.5

F= Frequency   P= Percentage

The data presented in Table 1 provides insights into the levels of social anxiety of students of each grade. Results showed that higher percentage of students from first year (42.8%) were found to have a high level of social anxiety as compared to the students of other grades. When the data have been analyzed, it was found that majority of the respondents from first year belonged to 19 years of age. According to World Health Organization (WHO), Adolescence is the phase of life between childhood and adulthood, from ages 10 to 19. This is a crucial period of human development, during which strong foundations for good health are established. It is characterized by rapid physical, cognitive, and psychosocial development. This impacts their emotions, thoughts, decision-making, and interactions with the world around them. This social reorientation is underpinned by the development of specific neurocognitive abilities. (Kilford *et al.,* 2016). Self- consciousness is one of them. Self-consciousness is the internal focus that has both a private and public dimension. (Davis and Franzoi, 1999). Public self-consciousness is the awareness of the self as a social object, whereas private self-consciousness is the awareness of one's own inner thoughts and feelings. Adolescence is considered to be the peak age for self-consciousness, especially the public aspect of it. (Cicchetti and Cohen 2006; Rankin *et al.* 2004; Vartanian 2000). They will become more perceptive of how others perceive them as their public self-consciousness grows. This awareness will guide their interactions with others and help them in building stronger, long-lasting relationships with their peers. However, it is highly likely that being more conscious of oneself as a social object can potentially lead to an increased susceptibility to social anxiety. In support of this notion, studies have found a connection between public self-consciousness and social anxiety among adolescents (Mallet and Rodriguez-Tomé, 1999) and adults (Mor and Winquist, 2002).

As well as heightened self-consciousness, they are particularly susceptible to the influence of their peers. It is an important period for learning social skills and forming relationships. It is believed that the positive and negative aspects of social interactions have a greater impact during this time, making social connections especially meaningful (Kilford *et al.,* 2016). In line with this, studies have been consistently shown that when adolescents experience peer rejection, it can have negative effects on their well- being. They may experience increased distress, anxiety, and a lower mood compared to children and adults. (Platt *et al.,*2013). The strong emotional impact of interactions with peers makes them more inclined to focus on building social connections. However, for certain individuals, this can also make them more susceptible to experiencing and struggling with social anxieties (Eldreth*et al*., 2013).

Table 2. Simple linear regression analysis of the impact of social anxiety on life style of the students

Independent variable	Beta coefficient	T	p	r	r^2
Life Style	-.394	-5.366	.000*	-.779	.607

Dependent Variable: Social anxiety

*p<0.05 (significant at 0.05%)

The findings of the study (Table 2) showed that social anxiety has a significant impact on life style of the students. The table revealed that the presence of social anxiety negatively impacts the students' life style. The higher the level of social anxiety, the poorer the life style of the students. This could be attributed to the fact that individuals with social anxiety experience heightened levels of anxiety and discomfort when faced with the possibility of embarrassment, humiliation, rejection, or being judged in social settings. As a result, they often try to avoid such situations or endure them with significant anxiety. Some common examples of this include an intense fear of public speaking, meeting new people, or eating/drinking in public. This fear or anxiety causes problems with daily functioning (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Thus, it would be challenging for a person with social anxiety to take part in social events and maintain fruitful relationships with others. It would be difficult to develop sense of belongingness within community, college, or among peer groups. According to Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA), social anxiety can lead to various challenges such as difficulties in school, lack of confidence in social situations, struggles in forming and maintaining friendships, feelings of depression, and potential substance abuse. Additionally, individuals with social anxiety may experience sleep problems, including dissatisfaction with sleep, impaired functioning due to sleep issues, concerns about sleep problems, and overall distress related to sleep (Buckner *et al.,* 2008). It is important to note that students with social anxiety often feel lonely and isolated, and they may have lower levels of life satisfaction and overall well- being compared to their peers without social anxiety (Brook *et al.,* 2015). During late teens or early twenties, many students may turn to alcohol as a means to cope with their social anxiety, which can potentially lead to further problems. Research has indeed shown a link between social anxiety and problematic alcohol use (Mendlowicz *et al.,* 2000). The findings are supported by a study conducted by Ratnani *et al.* (2017), who found that individuals with social anxiety are more likely to experience depression and have a lower quality of life.

Table 3. Multiple regression analysis of life style of students and five different variables of social anxiety

Predictor Variables	Beta (β)	coefficient t	p	R	r^2
Fear	-.071	-4.249	.000*		
Avoidance	-.093	-4.866	.000*		
Physiological Arousal	**-.050**	**-3.849**	.000*	-.779	.607
Poor Communication	-.086	-3.994	.000*		
Poor Confidence	**-.093**	**-4.939**	.000*		

*p< 0.05 (significant at 0.05%)

The findings (Table 3) showed that all the different variables of social anxiety (fear, avoidance, physiological arousal, poor communication, and poor confidence) contribute significantly on life style of the students at p<0.05 the level of significance. The results showed that the variable of poor confidence was the strongest predictor affecting social anxiety on life style of the students while the variable of physiological arousal showed the weakest predictor among all the variables. In the context of student life, there are various social demands that students must navigate, such as actively participating in class discussions, collaborating with peers on group projects, engaging in casual conversations with fellow students, establishing new friendships, and preparing for future career prospects through organizing work experience and job interviews. These situations often involve being evaluated, and since social anxiety is characterized by a fear of being negatively judged, it can significantly hinder a student's ability to thrive. The fear of negative evaluation is rooted in past experiences and underlying beliefs about others, which can impact individuals' ability to cope with daily life (Gill *et al.,* 2018). In addition, the fear of negative evaluation hinders individuals' efforts to engage with others, potentially leading to difficulties in appropriate social interaction and an increased sense of loneliness (Jackson *et al.,* 2002). Students who experience social anxiety frequently refrain from engaging in group projects or lectures during their college years due to feelings of embarrassment and self-consciousness. They may fear being subjected to criticism or experience distressing physical symptoms, such as sweating or stuttering (Haidl, 2018). Furthermore, research suggests that socially anxious students tend to evaluate their own abilities poorly when participating in seminars or presentations (Austin, 2004) and this worry continues regardless of whether or not the student performs well academically. In fact, social anxiety can have a profound impact on college life, to the extent that some studies have found that students with social anxiety may struggle to complete their education and end up dropping out before graduating (Van Ameringen *et al.,* 2003).

Social anxiety is also linked to significant difficulties in various areas of life, including social, occupational, and personal domains (Ruscio *et al.,* 2008, Stein and Kean, 2000). For example, individuals with social anxiety encounter more challenges in dating and forming friendships, experience more difficulties in social functioning such as participating in social and leisure activities, and are more likely to be unmarried and living alone (Lochner *et al.,* 2003). A key characteristic of social anxiety is the discomfort experienced when interacting with unfamiliar individuals

(Mattick & Clark, 1998). In a classroom setting, individuals with social anxiety may face challenges when it comes to social interactions or situations that require performance. This discomfort in communicating with others can put students with social anxiety at a disadvantage in academic settings. For instance, teaching methods that aim to enhance classroom engagement often involve communication, which can heighten anxiety for those who struggle with speaking in front of others (Czekanski & Wolf, 2013). Topham *et al.* (2014) conducted a thematic analysis to explore the experiences of socially anxious individuals in the classroom. The participants reported experiencing negative physiological reactions, feelings of self-consciousness, and distress. Similarly, Cohen *et al.* (2019) investigated the relationship between social anxiety, discomfort during active learning, and academic performance. The findings revealed a positive association between social anxiety and discomfort during active learning, which in turn influenced the final course grade. Active learning often involves engaging in discussions with peers (Cohen *et al.,* 2019), which can be particularly challenging for socially anxious students due to their concerns about receiving negative evaluations (Crozier, 2001).

Conclusion

There is a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the prediction of individuals who are prone to developing social anxiety issues and limited knowledge about the specific factors that contribute to the development of social anxiety. The emergence of digital communication appears to have given rise to a population of individuals who prefer to stay indoors, proudly proclaiming their introverted nature and relying on technology to fulfill their needs, such as ordering transportation and groceries without engaging in face-to-face interactions. Social anxiety, a prevalent mental illness, remains poorly understood outside of scientific circles. As social beings, humans are naturally inclined to seek social connections and acceptance from others. However, some individuals experience social anxiety, which stems from the fear of not being accepted by their peers. This fear triggers a response in the body and mind, even though there is no actual danger present. As a result, students with social anxiety may experience physical symptoms of fear, such as an increased heart rate and breathing. Based on the findings it can be concluded that social anxiety is prevalent among students, particularly among first-year students. The results also indicated that social anxiety can have a negative impact on various aspects of life, such as social relationships, academic performance, emotional well-being, and future career opportunities. Students with social anxiety face unique challenges that can hinder their learning in a traditional classroom setting. They may struggle to comprehend the material, participate in discussions, and may even feel hesitant to succeed academically due to their self-consciousness. However, acknowledging the signs of social anxiety is the first step toward seeking help. By understanding its effects on students and implementing appropriate strategies, educators can create a welcoming environment for all students to learn and develop. To minimize the consequences of unaddressed social anxiety, it is crucial for both educators and family members to actively support and empower students with social anxiety, enabling them to thrive more effectively.

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