

Social Anxiety, Self-Esteem, and Resilience among Young Adult Females

Simran Brijwani

Student, Department of Psychology, Vivekanand Education Society's College of Arts, Science, and Commerce, Mumbai.

Corresponding author: Simran Brijwani

Email – simranbrijwani6@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Background: Social anxiety impacts our self-worth and ability to deal with crises. Resilience may serve as a tool to mitigate social anxiety. The study examines the relationship between social anxiety, self-esteem, and resilience among young adult females. Further, it illustrates the role of sexual orientation, education, and employment status on the three variables.

Methodology: A purposive sample of 270 participants (233 heterosexual females and 37 LGBTQIA+ females) was obtained using the snowball sampling method. Females were chosen as the prevalence rate of social anxiety is more pronounced among females than males. Statistical analysis was done using R Studio.

Results: Findings suggest moderate negative correlations between social anxiety and self-esteem ($r = -0.462$, $p < 0.05$), social anxiety and resilience ($r = -0.348$, $p < 0.05$), and a moderate positive correlation between resilience and self-esteem ($r = 0.464$, $p < 0.05$). LGBTQIA+ females scored high on social anxiety and low on resilience and self-esteem than heterosexual females. Employment status has a significant impact on the three variables however educational qualifications did not produce any difference. Thus, the hypotheses of the study were validated.

Conclusion: The findings act as a catalyst in developing psychological interventions to improve the well-being of the youth. Future research can focus on the cultural aspects of social anxiety and its influence on self-esteem and resilience.

Keywords: Social anxiety, self-esteem, resilience, young adult females

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INTRODUCTION

Young adulthood is a transitional phase that comes with profound developmental changes and pressure to comply with societal demands. With the angst about the future and the pressure to have it all figured out, mental health among young adults goes for a toss. These years redefine our self-image and strengthen our interpersonal relationships. As a result, there is an emphasis on creating a desired self-image to influence how others perceive us [1].

Human beings feel safe in social situations where their words and actions are not driven by a desire to be liked and accepted. Often, social anxiety results from a desire to create a favorable self-image and a belief that one is failing to do so. The fear of negative evaluation and self-doubt of being unable to attain high standards in social interactions leaves one with feelings of helplessness and anxiety in social settings [1]. This anticipation may exert a catastrophic impact on one's self-worth and ability to deal with stressors.

Evidence suggests that our self-esteem dictates our personality and our interactions with others. People with low self-esteem underestimate their abilities and anticipate negative outcomes. A study was conducted on 334 students from a Jordan-based university to investigate the relationship between self-

esteem and social anxiety [2]. Results revealed that there was a negative correlation between the two variables. Individuals who score high on social anxiety tend to evaluate themselves negatively in social settings. Thus, high self-esteem can serve as a shield against social anxiety. Findings can be validated using past research [3] and [4].

It is a well-established fact that self-esteem is a robust predictor of resilience and psychological well-being. A recent study confirmed a positive correlation between resilience and self-esteem and suggested that individuals with a higher sense of self-worth readily thrive under pressure [5]. Findings have received support through research by [6]. Furthermore, in the Indian context, the LGBTQIA+ community is discriminated against, stigmatized, and excluded. Familial rejection, internalized homophobia, and a lack of connectedness make them more vulnerable to loneliness, stress, and anxiety in social settings [7]. Thus, resilience helps cultivate effective coping strategies, meaning in life events, and perseverance. Consequently, recent research has discovered that resilience-based programs have high success outcomes in enhancing self-esteem, especially among LGBT youth [8].

Individuals with social anxiety are more vulnerable to negative life outcomes as they engage in avoidance behaviors to cope with social anxiety [9]. Resilience during psychological distress can help deal effectively with stressors that may cause anxiety [10]. Thus, resilience serves as a protective factor against social anxiety. There is a distinction between 'Social Anxiety' and 'Social Anxiety Disorder.' When social anxiety shifts from a physiological state of arousal to affecting overall functionality, it becomes a disorder. The present study evaluates social anxiety (the dominant fear of being scrutinized in social situations with self-esteem and resilience) among young adult females.

Past research suggests that the prevalence of social anxiety is more pronounced among females, especially among the young adult population [11]. They appear to be more prone to emotional distress, isolation, and loneliness that impairs their mental health. Thus, it is imperative to explore how the same variables interact and influence how these individuals view themselves and cope with the life hassles that come their way. The need for this study arises from the scarce literature on social anxiety among young adults in India. Therefore, the present study is an effort to investigate social anxiety among young adult females in combination with resilience and self-esteem. Existing literature suggests that the constructs of social anxiety, self-esteem, and resilience contribute significantly to our mental health. The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between social anxiety, self-esteem, and resilience among young adults.

Hypotheses

- There exists a significant relationship between social anxiety, self-esteem, and resilience among young adult females.
- There exists a difference in the scores on social anxiety, self-esteem, and resilience among young adult females based on their employment status.
- There exists a difference in scores on social anxiety, self-esteem, and resilience among young females based on their educational status.
- There exists a difference in scores on social anxiety, self-esteem, and resilience among young adult heterosexual females and females from the LGBTQIA+ community.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

270 young adult females aged between 18 to 30 years were selected using the snowball sampling method, out of which 233 (86.2%) were heterosexual females, and 37 (13.70%) were LGBTQIA+ females. The sample was purposive and included young adult females as the prevalence rate of social anxiety is high among females [11]. The prevalence of social anxiety disorder is high in young adults, especially females [12].

Inclusion criteria: Young Adult Female (18-30 years) residing in India

Research Design: The current study adopted a correlational design to investigate the relationship between social anxiety, self-esteem, and resilience among young adult females.

Measures

1. **Rosenberg's Self-esteem scale (RSE):** It was developed by Morris Rosenberg (1965) and consisted of 10 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale. It measures 'global self-esteem.' The scale ranges from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree,' and scores lie between 0-and 30. Items 2,5,6,8,9 are reverse coded. Scoring entails a sum of all the obtained scores. Scores ranging from 15 to 25 are considered normal, whereas scores below 15 suggest low self-esteem. The RSE demonstrates an excellent internal consistency with the reproducibility coefficient of 0.92 and test-retest reliability of .85 and .88 for two weeks. RSE shows construct validity, concurrent, and predictive validity [13].
2. **Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS):** The SIAS is a 20-item instrument designed by Mattick and Clarke (1998). It measures 'anxiety experienced during social interaction situations.' Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (0) "not at all characteristic of me" to (4) "extremely characteristic of me." Items 5, 9, and 11 are reverse coded. Scoring entails a sum of scores and lies between 0-and 80. The SIAS has shown high convergent validity, high internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha of 0.88 to 0.94, and test-retest reliability of 0.92 and 0.93 for three months [14].
3. **Brief Resilience Scale (BRS):** It is a uni-dimensional measure developed by Smith et. al (2008). It measures 'an ability to bounce back from a stressful situation.' The scale consists of 6 items, rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) 'strongly disagree' to (5) 'strongly agree.' Items 2, 4, and 6 are reverse coded, and a mean of all the items is taken. The higher the scores, the higher the resilience. The BRS has the test-retest reliability of 0.69 for one month and 0.62 for three months. It has a high internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.80 and 0.91 [15].

Procedure

The Social Interaction Anxiety Scale, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the Brief Resilience Scale were used to gather relevant information from the participants. Responses were obtained using Google forms. Informed consent was obtained from the participants using a consent form that embedded information related to the study and aspects of confidentiality and voluntary participation. The overall time taken to fill out the Google form was 20 minutes. Statistical analysis was performed using RStudio.

Statistical Analysis

The researcher used both descriptive and inferential statistics to carry out the statistical analysis. Spearman's rank-order correlation and other non-parametric alternatives such as the Mann Whitney U test and Kruskal Wallis-H test were calculated using RStudio.

RESULTS

The purpose of the study was to ascertain the relationship between social anxiety, self-esteem, and resilience among young adult females. The obtained data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and non-parametric tests (Mann Whitney U test, Kruskal Wallis test, and Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation Coefficient).

Table 1: Correlation between social anxiety, self-esteem, and resilience

	Self-Esteem	Social Anxiety	Resilience
Self-Esteem	-	-	-
Social Anxiety	-0.462*	-	-
Resilience	0.464*	-0.348*	-

*: $p < 0.05$

Table 1 reveals the correlation between social anxiety, self-esteem, and resilience. Shapiro-Wilk tests and Levene's tests were conducted for all the variables to check for normality and homogeneity of the variance. As the two assumptions were not met, spearman rank-order correlations were calculated. Findings reveal

that there is a moderate negative correlation between social anxiety and self-esteem ($r = -0.462$, $p < 0.05$) and social anxiety and resilience ($r = -0.348$, $p < 0.05$), and a moderate positive correlation between resilience and self-esteem ($r = 0.464$, $p < 0.05$). All three correlations are statistically significant. On the whole, there exists a relationship between self-esteem, social anxiety and resilience, and resilience among young adult females. Therefore, the hypothesis “there exists a significant relationship between social anxiety, self-esteem, and resilience among young adult females” was supported.

The researcher also studied the role of certain demographic variables (such as sexual orientation, employment status, and educational qualifications) on the variables under study using non-parametric tests. As both the groups (heterosexual females and LGBTQIA+ females) were unequal, and the assumption of normality was not met, the Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare the two groups based on sexual orientation.

Table 2: The n, mean, SD, H, and p-values of self-esteem, social anxiety, and resilience concerning the sexual orientation of young adult females

Variables	Group	Mean Rank	SD	Mann Whitney U	P-value
Self-Esteem	Heterosexual females	29.29	5.69	6703	0.000*
	LGBTQIA+ females	23.08	2		
Social Anxiety	Heterosexual females	36.33	16.46	3046.5	0.004*
	LGBTQIA+ females	44.02	14		
Resilience	Heterosexual females	18.99	4.77	5737.5	0.001*
	LGBTQIA+ females	16.08	3		

*: $p < 0.05$

According to Table 2, there is a significant difference in the scores obtained by both the groups on self-esteem ($U = 6703$, $p < 0.01$), social anxiety ($U = 3046.5$, $p = 0.004$), and resilience ($U = 5737.5$, $p = 0.001$). Thus, we accept the alternative hypothesis that “there exists a difference in scores on social anxiety, self-esteem, and resilience among young adult heterosexual females and females from the LGBTQIA+ community.” The mean ranks revealed that self-esteem (29.29) and resilience (18.99) were higher among heterosexual females. However, social anxiety (44.02) was higher among LGBTQIA+ females.

Further, the researcher studied how employment status influences self-esteem, social anxiety, and resilience among the two groups of young adult females. Groups employed and self-employed were combined to make data analysis more efficient.

Table 3: The n, mean, SD, H, and p-values of self-esteem, social anxiety, and resilience concerning the employment status of young adult females

Variable	Group	N	Mean Rank	SD	Mann Whitney U	P-value
Self-Esteem	Employed	99	29.54	2	9737	0.03*
	Unemployed	171	27.81	1.5		
Social Anxiety	Employed	99	19.41	4.65	9751	0.03*
	Unemployed	171	18.12	5.03		
Resilience	Employed	99	34.09	15.02	7037.5	0.02*
	Unemployed	171	39.09	17.12		

*: $p < 0.05$

As per Table 3, there is a significant difference in the scores obtained by the two groups on self-esteem ($U = 9737$, $p < 0.05$), social anxiety ($U = 9751$, $p < 0.05$), and resilience ($U = 7037.5$, $p < 0.05$). Therefore, we retain the alternative hypothesis that suggests that “There exists a difference in the scores on self-esteem

among young adult females based on their employment status."By comparing the mean ranks, employed females scored high on self-esteem (29.54) and social anxiety (19.41), and low on resilience (34.09). In addition, the study examined the role of educational qualifications on self-esteem, social anxiety, and resilience among young adult females. As the three groups were unequal, and the assumption of normality was not met, the Kruskal Wallis-H test was used.

Table 4: The n, mean, SD, H, and p-values of self-esteem, social anxiety, and resilience concerning the educational qualifications of young adult females.

Variable	N	Mean Rank	Kruskal Wallis H	df	P-value
Self-Esteem	270	27.5	5.272	4	0.260
Social Anxiety		33.82	6.241	6	0.396
Resilience		17.81	4.104	4	0.396

*: $p < 0.05$

Table 4 studies the n, mean, SD, H, and p-values of self-esteem, social anxiety, and resilience concerning participants educational qualifications (SSC/HSC, Undergraduate, Postgraduate). The obtained results suggest that $p > 0.05$ for all three groups. The difference between the scores on social anxiety, self-esteem, and resilience is not statistically significant. Thus, we reject the alternative hypothesis that suggests that "There exists a difference in scores on self-esteem among young females based on their educational status."

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the relationship between social anxiety, self-esteem, and resilience among young adult females. The prevalence rate of social anxiety is high among females [11]. Thus, the sample consisted of 270 young adult females between 18 to 30 years, out of which there were 233 heterosexual females and 37 LGBTQIA+ females.

It was hypothesized that "there exists a significant relationship between social anxiety, self-esteem and resilience among young adult females." Moderate negative correlations between social anxiety and self-esteem ($r = -0.462$), social anxiety and resilience ($r = -0.348$), and a moderate positive correlation between resilience and self-esteem ($r = 0.464$) were obtained. Individuals with social anxiety tend to score low on self-esteem and resilience. They are self-critical and anticipate negative self-evaluations from others [2]. In addition, they have a small, embedded support system and struggle to maintain interpersonal relationships. Contrarily, resilient people make objective evaluations of challenging times and have good social skills [1]. As a result, they readily seek help during turbulent times and are less likely to experience anxiety in social situations. Results are consistent with studies by [16] and [9]. People with high self-esteem seem to have higher resilience. They are less self-critical, regulate emotions effectively, and adapt to stressful situations [6].

In addition, sexual orientation influences scores on social anxiety ($U = 3046.5$, $p = 0.004$), self-esteem ($U = 6703$, $p < 0.01$), and resilience ($U = 5737.5$, $p = 0.001$) among young adult females. The mean ranks [Table 2] show that LGBTQIA+ females score high on social anxiety ($M = 44.02$) and low on self-esteem ($M = 23.08$) and resilience ($M = 16.08$). A recent study reveals that the LGBTQ youth experiences bullying, microaggressions, stigma, isolation, and invalidation that may affect their social interactions and contribute to social anxiety [17].

It was found that employment status leads to differences in scores on social anxiety, self-esteem, and resilience. Employed young adult females score high on self-esteem ($M = 29.54$) and social anxiety ($M = 19.41$) and low on resilience ($M = 34.09$). Findings can be explained using the 'social comparison theory' that states that humans derive their self-worth by comparing themselves with others. An upward comparison with individuals having a high financial stand may affect their self-esteem [18]. Employed young adult females scored low on resilience, and it can be attributed to the shift to working from home

models due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The sample comprises young adults, seemingly in the emerging phase of their careers. Long working hours, fewer breaks, and high salary cuts leave them less time and energy to maintain active connections with loved ones. It may result in loneliness, stress, burnout, poor quality of life, and mental health. The 9-to-5 work timeline has shifted to endless virtual meetings and zero work-life balance. Staring at the screen and having others stare at you all day while speaking makes it difficult to gauge non-verbal gestures/movements. There is uncertainty about how others perceive us, and it causes a fear of negative evaluation that may contribute to social anxiety.

The researcher found that differences in social anxiety, self-esteem, and resilience based on education qualifications were not statistically significant. However, the mean ranks explain the trends in scores on the three variables [Table 4]. Postgraduates scored high on self-esteem (29.56) than undergraduates (27.15) and SSC/HSC (27.5). Thus, as the level of education increases, the acquisition of knowledge and skills also increases [19]. It enables an individual to gain access to more opportunities to flourish and earn a living.

The limitations of the study lie in its sampling procedure. The sample only consisted of young adult females. As a result, the findings cannot be generalized to other age groups and individuals with different biological characteristics and gender identities. Furthermore, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown restrictions, the study had to be conducted online using Google forms. Thus, the sample was limited to participants well-versed in English and who had access to the internet. The forms did not reach the rural population. Young adult females from rural areas may present different trends in the variables under study. In addition, the study did not consider the mental and physical health of the participants. The understanding of these factors may affect the results.

Our results offer empirical evidence that social anxiety, self-esteem, and resilience significantly affect the mental health of young adult females. Thus, the study has several implications for research and development. Findings suggest that resilience-based training programs and psychological interventions help foster self-esteem among young adult females. As the LGBTQIA+ youth are more vulnerable to mental illnesses than the cis-heterosexual youth, making these programs and interventions affordable and accessible can become resources to help them cope with additional everyday stressors. Incorporating mental health culture into the educational curriculum and corporate training can help individuals enhance productivity and social skills. These initiatives may help young people adapt better to the changing environment. It is a dire need, especially amid a global pandemic.

The current literature focuses heavily on self-esteem and social anxiety among adolescents. Therefore, an avenue for future research could extend the study to other age groups and include the rural populations. As our culture affects the manifestation of social anxiety in different social settings, future research could examine these cultural differences and their impact on resilience and self-esteem. Besides, the present study needs to be carried out after the pandemic in a COVID-free setting to rule out the effect of the pandemic on the three variables.

CONCLUSION

The present study has clarified the links between social anxiety, self-esteem, and resilience affecting young adults. Research suggests that these variables produce an insurmountable impact on health. Hence, it is imperative to understand the interplay between them. Sexual orientation and employment status also contribute to social anxiety, self-esteem, and resilience. LGBTQIA+ females score higher on social anxiety and low on self-esteem and resilience than their heterosexual peers. Thus, easy access to affordable resilience-based programs and psychological interventions would help combat psychological distress and improve quality of life. It would be interesting to see whether the findings will hold for other age groups. Future research can study the cultural aspects of social anxiety and its influence on self-esteem and resilience.

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