



Gender Differences in Social Anxiety Disorder among Iranian Adolescents

Soghra Ostovar Ph.D

College of Education and psychology ShirazFarhangian University, Iran

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SUMMARY - The purpose of this study was to investigate gender differences on the Social Anxiety disorder for Iranian adolescents. 200 junior high school students (100 girls and 100 boys), were selected randomly from four junior high schools in Shiraz, completed the Social Anxiety Scale by subjects. Analysis showed that in comparison to boys, adolescent girls report higher levels of Social Anxiety, Distress in New situations and Fear of Negative Evaluation Subscales.

Keywords: Gender differences, Social anxiety disorder, Adolescents

I. INTRODUCTION

Social anxiety disorder is one of the most common and disabling anxiety disorders (Kessler et al.,2005) with a particularly low natural recovery rate (Bruce et al.,2005). The condition almost always starts in childhood or adolescence (Kessler et al.,2005) and can have profound effects on development that are hard to overcome later in life. A crowded classroom can make socially anxious youths self-conscious, making it difficult for them to follow what the teacher says, and consequently undermine exam performance. The development of social and romantic relationships is also impeded. Individuals fear a range of social interactions, such as conversations with strangers, joining in groups or speaking on the telephone. Most things that involve being observed by others are difficult. These include walking into a room when other people are already seated, eating or drinking in public, and performing in front of an audience. Sufferers fear that they will say or do something that they believe will be humiliating or embarrassing. Common concerns include the fear of sweating, shaking, blushing, stumbling over words, looking anxious, or appearing boring, stupid, or incompetent (Stein and Stein 2008).In recent years, research has increasingly focused on gender differences in the anxiety disorders (e.g., Bekker, 1996; Castle, Deale, & Marks, 1995; Oei, Wanstall, & Evans, 1990; Turk, Heimberg, Orsillo& Holt, 1998). Social phobia is an anxiety disorder that is characterized by the strong desire to

make a favorable impression of oneself on others, in conjunction with a marked insecurity about one's ability to do so. Individuals with social phobia avoid situations in which there is potential for negative evaluation by others (Clark & wells, 1995). Despite the ample literature on gender differences in anxiety and mood disorders, gender differences in social anxiety disorder (SAD) have received little empirical attention. Although investigations of childhood and adolescent anxiety have flourished in recent years in Iran, minimal research has focused on social phobia or social anxiety symptoms in children or adolescents. Furthermore, it appears that adolescence is a period of when individuals may be most susceptible to social anxiety. Therefore the purpose of this study was to examine gender differences in social anxiety among Iranian adolescents.

II. METHOD

Sample

The sample consisted of 200 second grade students (100 girls and 100 boys) who were selected by applying a cluster sampling method.four junior high schools in Shiraz. The selected high schools were located in different regions of Shiraz to represent different socioeconomic statuses.

Instrument

Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents (SAS-A; La Greca& Lopez, 1998). The Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents consists of 18 items reflecting fears of negative evaluation and social avoidance and distress, with four filler items. Students indicate on a 5-point continuum how much an item characterizes themselves. Factor analysis of the SAS-A has produced three factor: fear of negative evaluation (FNE, which consists of eight items: e.g., "I worry about what others say about me"), social avoidance and distress in new situations (SAD-N, which consists of six items: e.g., "I feel shy around people I don't know"), and social avoidance and distress-general (SAD-G, which consists of four items: for example, "I feel shy even with peers I know very well") (LaGreca&



Lopes, 1998). Each scale is scored such that higher scores reflect greater social anxiety Scores from the subscales can be summed to form a total score (ranging from 18 to 90). In this study confirmatory factor analysis has indicated an identical factor structure with LaGerca & Lope, 1998. Also, in this study internal consistency coefficients for the SAS-A subscales were range of $\alpha = .78$ to .95. In general, high reliability of .70 have been obtained for the total SAS-A score (La Greca & Lopez, 1998, Ostovar & Razavieh, 2013).

Procedure

The questionnaire was given to subjects in normal junior high school classes, as a group, and were completed by all of the students enrolled at the time. Trained graduate and undergraduate students were available to answer questions or provide help as needed. Completion of the measure used in the present study took students approximately 10 to 15 minutes.

III. RESULTS

Means and standard deviations on total scores social anxiety for boys and girls are presented in Table 1. An independent t-test was used to compare the mean scores of the girls and boys students. The analyses showed significant differences between the social anxiety scores of girls and boys students ($t = 3.52, P < .001$). Also, as can be seen in Table 2, girls scored significantly higher than boys on the Social Avoidance and Distress-New and on the Fear of Negative Evaluation subscales, while there was no difference on the Social Avoidance and Distress-General.

TABIE 1

MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS ON TOTALE SOCIAL ANXIETY SCORES FOR BOYS AND GIRLES (N = 200)

Group	n	M	SD	t	p
Girls	100	39.14	10.56	3.52	.001
Boys	100	35.12	9.92		

TABIE 2

MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS ON THREE SUBSCALES FOR BOYS AND GIRLS (ns = 100)

Subscales	Group	M	SD	t	P
FNE	Girls	20.70	6.37	2.64	03
	Boys	19.24	6.73		
SAD-N	Girls	9.20	3.76	2.18	01
	Boys	8.12	3.10		
SAD-G	Girls	9.37	3.54	1.45	NS
	Boys	9.75	4.30		

Note FNE-Fear of Negative Evaluation, SAD-N=Social Avoidance and Distress-New, SADG=Social Avoidance and Distress-General.

IV. DISCUSSION

Consistent with previous studies (La Gerca, 1998, Inderbitzen & Hope, 1995, La Gerca & Lopez, 1998), results from this study indicated that girls reported greater social anxiety than boys. Girls in this study had higher scores on the SAS-A total, the FNE subscale, and the SAD-New subscale than did boys. These findings support the suggestion of previous researchers (e.g., Crombie, 1988; Maccoby, 1990) that social skills and interpersonal relationships are more important to girls than boys. The existing literature reports confusing and inconsistent results about gender differences in social anxiety. Whereas some authors have found clear differences in social anxiety for community individuals (e.g., Hirai, Vernon, Clum, and Skidmore, 2011), others have not (e.g., Iancu et al., 2006). Similar results have been recorded for social anxiety patients, with some studies reporting significant differences between men and women (e.g., Turk et al., 1998), while others do not (e.g., Baños et al., 2007; Stewart & Mandrusiak, 2007). Ethnological-cultural factors do contribute specifically to SAD. Girls and boys may be educated with different gender roles right from the start, at least in some of the situations. Women in some societies seem to play a more passive role in their relationships with men, which is associated with a female role in Iranian society. It is also probable that the social behavior of Iranian women is more strictly controlled by parents and society than in the men's case. This would more accurately reflect the real state of social anxiety for men and women, providing much more useful clinical information that would be beneficial for screening patients with this disorder and planning more effective psychological treatment. Certain limitations of the current study should be taken into account when interpreting the results. The limitation of this study is, the sample of the study are Iranian adolescents hence the result could not be generalized on the nationals. Similarly, the study was quantitative which did not have provision for in-depth investigation so, the researcher suggest a further study on qualitative approach. Results from this study suggest that the most problematic time for experiencing social anxiety is during junior high school and that girls may be more at risk than boys. Given that this sample was drawn from a regular population, however, it will be important to determine whether such gender differences exist in clinical



populations. Future investigations that focus on gender differences may provide valuable information for effective treatment strategies for girls with social anxiety disorders.

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