



SOCIAL PHOBIA AS A FACTOR INFLUENCING ADOLESCENTS' ADAPTATION TO SOCIAL ENVIRONMENTS

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Abstract

This article explores the manifestation, psychological features, and negative consequences of social phobia during adolescence. Social phobia is described as a persistent fear of situations in which a person might be evaluated by others. It is often associated with low self-esteem, a critical self-image, excessive concern about others' opinions, and the lasting presence of negative memories. Adolescents suffering from social anxiety tend to avoid communication with strangers, public speaking, and participation in social interactions. Their social skills are underdeveloped, which may result in difficulties in both academic and personal life. The article highlights that social phobia is not just extreme shyness but a serious psychological condition that can disrupt a person's well-being. Unlike general nervousness, this disorder significantly impacts everyday functioning and requires timely psychological intervention. Findings underline the importance of early detection and the application of appropriate psychological strategies to support adolescents in overcoming the fear of social evaluation and building confidence.

Keywords: Social phobia, adolescence, social anxiety, fear of evaluation, self-esteem, social withdrawal, psychological intervention, somatic symptoms, communication avoidance, cognitive symptoms.



Introduction

In today's era of globalization and digital communication, the issue of adolescents' adaptation to the social environment has become one of the most pressing concerns. Adolescence, characterized by unique psychological changes, identity formation, and the acceptance of social roles, demands in-depth study of the psychological conditions that arise during this critical stage. One such condition that deserves special attention is social phobia, also known as social anxiety disorder. Research shows that social phobia often begins during adolescence and, if not identified early, can negatively affect an individual's social, academic, and professional functioning throughout life. According to researchers, "social phobia is a common mental health disorder that begins in childhood or adolescence, and if left untreated, can become chronic and severely impair quality of life and functioning" (Stein & Stein, 2008).¹ Furthermore, "social phobia is a highly prevalent condition among adolescents and is associated with significant impairments across multiple domains. Its early detection and intervention represent important scientific and psychological challenges" (Beesdo, Knappe, & Pine, 2007).² Therefore, studying the role of social phobia in the social adaptation of adolescent students and developing effective early identification and intervention strategies is of great relevance today.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social phobia, or Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD), is a psychological condition characterized by persistent fear of being judged, rejected, or negatively evaluated in social situations. This condition typically begins in childhood or adolescence, and if not identified early, it can negatively affect an individual's social adaptation, self-esteem, and academic or professional success (Rapee & Spence, 2004).

As noted by Beesdo, Knappe, and Pine (2007), social anxiety is one of the most common anxiety disorders among adolescents. If not treated in time, it can lead to depression, school dropout, and social isolation. Stein & Stein (2008) showed in

¹ Stein, M. B., & Stein, D. J. (2008). Social anxiety disorder. *The Lancet*, 371(9618), 1115–1125. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(08\)60488-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(08)60488-2)

² Beesdo, K., Knappe, S., & Pine, D. S. (2007). Anxiety and anxiety disorders in children and adolescents: Developmental issues and implications for DSM-V. *Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 32(3), 483–524. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psc.2009.06.002>



their study that social phobia tends to be especially strong and persistent when it begins early, and this disorder can persist throughout life. In the context of Uzbekistan, this issue has been relatively understudied. Currently, there is a noticeable increase in social anxiety and negative self-evaluation among youth, likely due to the widespread use of the internet and social media . Additionally, in the modern school environment, aspects such as students' verbal performance, speaking in front of the class, and participating in debates are emerging as primary factors contributing to social phobia. Research shows that adolescents prone to social anxiety tend to evaluate themselves negatively, frequently imagine negative scenarios related to public situations, and often try to avoid social contexts altogether (Clark & Wells, 1995). This not only leads to psychological stress but also results in the deterioration of friendships, social isolation, and a decline in quality of life (La Greca & Lopez, 1998). The issue of social phobia is being widely studied in psychology, psychiatry, pedagogy, and neurobiology. According to research, social anxiety typically develops during childhood or adolescence, but its early signs often go unnoticed (Stein & Stein, 2008). Based on the findings of Beesdo and colleagues (2007), this condition is one of the most frequently observed anxiety disorders among adolescents. According to the cognitive model developed by Clark and Wells (1995), individuals suffering from social anxiety evaluate themselves negatively in social situations. Increased internal focus and negative automatic thoughts further intensify anxiety. Rapee and Heimberg (1997) describe social phobia as a persistent fear of social evaluation. They argue that genetic factors, parenting style, and traumatic experiences play a significant role in the development of this condition. The prevalence of social phobia among adolescents and its effect on their social adjustment has been confirmed in studies by La Greca and Lopez (1998). According to their findings, students with social anxiety face significant difficulties in forming friendships and actively participating in classroom activities. Furthermore, Hofmann and colleagues (2004) studied the physiological and psychological symptoms of social phobia in depth and found that Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is an effective treatment method.

In recent years, there has been growing attention to psychological well-being within Uzbekistan's education system. Emotional and psychological problems observed in students—particularly those related to social anxiety—have become a central focus for school psychologists and specialists. The Ministry of Preschool



and School Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan is strengthening psychological services within educational institutions. However, in current practice, the processes of identifying symptoms of social anxiety in adolescents and working with them systematically still lack a sufficient scientific basis. Experts emphasize that many cases of social anxiety in students go undetected. They point out that school psychologists often lack the skills to use diagnostic tools effectively, and that parents tend to underestimate the problem, often perceiving social anxiety as mere shyness. This contributes to the deepening of the issue. In today's school environment—particularly against the backdrop of urbanization and the expansion of digital communication tools—students' real-life social interaction skills are weakening. Although many adolescents are active in online spaces, they tend to avoid participating in face-to-face communication. This creates a favorable environment for the development of social anxiety.

DISCUSSION

At the beginning of the scientific research, social phobia in adolescents was studied from a theoretical perspective. Then, in order to examine the practical aspects of overcoming social phobia in adolescents, School No. 1, located in the city of Margilan, Fergana region, under the Ministry of Secondary Specialized Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan, was selected as the research site. For our study, 80 seventh-grade students (38 boys and 42 girls) aged between 11 and 14 were selected as respondents. Before starting the research, the participants were informed about the study and its purpose.

After that, I provided information about the “Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS)” test, which was aimed at identifying the level of social phobia in the students. The LSAS is a questionnaire developed by Dr. Michael Liebowitz, a psychiatric researcher at Columbia University and the New York State Psychiatric Institute. This scale allows for the assessment of the role social phobia plays in a person's life across various situations. No difficulties were encountered during the administration of the methodology. All respondents completed the test willingly and with great interest. In order to further increase the quality and reliability of the research, a second methodology was also administered to the same 80 respondents. This m

Methodology, developed by A.M. Prikhozhan, is called the “Anxiety Level Measurement Scale.” This scale-questionnaire can be used to assess the level of anxiety in the participants. 2. Using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov criterion, we determined the reliability level of the scales. We analyzed whether the data conformed to the normal distribution law or not.

Table 1. Determining the reliability level of the scales using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test.

Indicators	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	Significance Level (p-value)
Assessment of social phobia level	0,945	0,333
School-related anxiety	1,012	0,058
Self-esteem-related anxiety	0,939	0,041*
Interpersonal relationship-related anxiety	1,088	0,087

The number of participants in our study was 80. We analyzed whether the obtained data conformed to the law of normal distribution. According to the results, the data obtained from the Social Phobia Assessment Scale ($D=0.945$) conformed to the normal distribution. The data related to school-related anxiety ($D=1.012$) also met the criteria for normal distribution. However, the data on self-assessment-related anxiety ($D=0.939$) did not conform to the normal distribution. Therefore, this scale should be analyzed using non-parametric methods. Similarly, the data related to interpersonal relationship anxiety ($D=1.088$) did not meet the criteria for normal distribution either.

Table 2. Results of the 'Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS)' methodology

Category Number of Respondents	High level of social phobia	Moderate (within normal range) social phobia	No social phobia
80	26	43	11
100%	33%	54%	14%



The application of the “Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS)” yielded the following results:

- Social phobia was present in 26 students (32%),
- Social phobia was within normal limits in 43 students (54%),
- And 11 students (14%) showed no signs of social phobia.

RESULTS

Among the adolescents who participated in the study, individuals with high levels of social phobia, within-normal-range social phobia, and no social phobia were identified. According to the results, 33% (N = 26) of adolescents had high levels of social phobia, 54% (N = 43) had social phobia within the normal range, and 14% (N = 11) did not exhibit signs of social phobia. This indicates that 68% of the students do not demonstrate problematic behavior from the perspective of social phobia. However, the fact that 33% (N = 26) of the adolescents showed high levels of social phobia suggests that it is advisable to conduct a more in-depth psychological examination of these students. The presence of a high level of social phobia in these 33% of adolescents indicates the need for professional psychological intervention. Therefore, these 26 respondents were selected for further correctional work due to their elevated phobia indicators.

Adolescence is a complex and significant stage of personal and social development, and the psychological issues that may arise during this period—particularly social phobia—can have a substantial impact on mental well-being and social adjustment. Through this study, the level of social phobia among adolescents and its influence on their interaction with the external environment were examined systematically.

As a theoretical basis, modern psychological approaches to the concept of social phobia were analyzed, and appropriate psychometric assessment tools were selected. The practical part of the research was conducted with students from the No. 1 general education school in the city of Margilan, where the level of social phobia and related anxiety states were assessed. The study utilized the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS) and A.M. Prikhozhan’s methodology for measuring anxiety levels to identify various manifestations of social phobia. The results of statistical analysis showed that social phobia manifests at varying levels among respondents. An important aspect of the study was the application of the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test to assess the reliability of the scales, which helped



determine the extent to which the data conformed to a normal distribution. This, in turn, ensured the accuracy and reliability of the methodological approaches used in subsequent analyses.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study indicate that social phobia among adolescents is a highly relevant and pressing issue, highlighting the necessity of early detection and timely intervention. In particular, the findings emphasize the importance of conducting individualized psychoprophylactic and psychocorrectional work with students who exhibit high levels of social phobia. This situation, in turn, underscores the need to strengthen psychological services within educational institutions, to develop students' social-emotional competencies, and to create a supportive environment conducive to their psychological well-being. In conclusion, the problem of social phobia among adolescents demands special attention from modern psychological services, as it significantly affects not only their personal development but also their readiness for social integration. The outcomes of this research can serve as a scientific foundation for organizing psychological diagnostics, rehabilitation, and preventive interventions in a systematic and evidence-based manner.

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