

Fear of Negative Evaluation and Emotional / Social Loneliness in Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

Around the world today, young adults are constantly confronted with the fear of receiving negative evaluation from others which forces them into the obscure spaces of desolation. This study examined the effects of fear of negative evaluation on the emotional/social loneliness in a sample of young adults (N=162) within the age group of 18 to 25 years. The data was collected through convenience sampling technique. Brief fear of negative evaluation scale (Leary, 1983) and emotional/social loneliness inventory (Vincenzi & Grabosky, 1987) were used. The statistical method used was Spearman Rank correlation. Findings revealed a positive correlation between fear of negative evaluation and emotional/social loneliness. The study concluded that fear of negative evaluation produces social and emotional alienation.

KEYWORDS: *Emotional/Social loneliness, Fear of negative evaluation, desolation, alienation, college students*

INTRODUCTION

Embarrassment and feeling of shame enfolds an individual when he/she violates a moral norm or expected standard. This is because people often fear how others judge them. If this fear of being judged is too high it can evoke anxiety which results in neediness and insecurity which can drive others from us. Ultimately it can result in loss of self respect and social alienation. David Icke says that "the greatest prison people live in is the fear of what other people think."

Student life is one of the best and most memorable periods in an individual's life and there are plenty of challenges that young adults have to face in their student life. These include social anxiety, social expectations, low esteem and social isolation. Young adults have always experienced these challenges in their life. The current social situations are adversely affecting each individual and in case of college students it is affecting their academic performances as well as in facing chronic loneliness.

Fear of negative evaluation (FNE) was originally defined as a trait related to "apprehension about others evaluations, distress over their negative evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively" (Watson & Friend, 1969). The root cause of this is social anxiety. Fear of negative evaluation is found to affect an individual's expressiveness, performance and is associated with prosocial behavior and conformity. It can improve the quality of thought and arguments. Fear of negative evaluation holds individuals from performing positive actions whereas loneliness is a state of mind which causes a person to feel isolated even if they are surrounded by many. Loneliness is typically defined by researchers as involving the cognitive awareness of an inefficiency in one's social and personal relationships, and the ensuing affective reactions of sadness, emptiness, or longing (Asher & Paquette, 2003). Emotional and social loneliness can affect an individual's interpersonal relationship and may lead to depression, introverted behaviour and poor social skills. Social loneliness is caused by the lack of social contact whereas emotional loneliness is caused by lack of attachment. To some extent loneliness can help to recharge our brain and to be more creative and productive. But in some instances it can be counterproductive as it can lead to lethargy and can also result in depression. Loneliness can also lead to substance abuse and can lead to suicidal thoughts in young adults.

From the recent decade it is obvious that there is an increase in overall suicidal rates in young adults. Loneliness, fear of negative evaluation and depression are often regarded as the counterparts for this

suicidal tendency. Fear of negative evaluation is linked to suicidal tendency among students which can be inferred from the following example. Some of the students who are expecting their academic results are often seemed to have shown suicidal tendency due to the fear of the negative evaluation from others. They fear that scoring low marks would cause others to judge them negatively (Preston et al., 2021).

Even though the young adults are equipped with innovative ideas, the fear of negative evaluation holds them back thus preventing them from implementing their thoughts into action and makes them socially and emotionally isolated.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A study conducted by Ganesh et al., (2015) measures the relationship between fear of negative evaluation and anxiety at VIT University Chennai among 64 engineering students including both hostel dwellers and day scholars. The data was selected through Simple random sampling method. The result shows that there is a significant positive relationship between anxiety and fear of negative evaluation.

Amna Iqbal and Amna Ajmal (2019) investigated the relationship between fear of negative evaluation and social anxiety in young adults. The study was conducted among 230 young adults from different departments of BahaudianZakriya University Multan. The study concluded that fear of negative evaluation produces social anxiety in young adults.

The study conducted by AntonijaMaričić and Marina Štambuk (2015) aims to measure the role of loneliness in the relationship between social anxiety and subjective well-being among a sample of 202 students. The result stated that the symptoms of social anxiety that contribute to its relation with subjective well-being through loneliness are those related to the concerns of being negatively evaluated or merely observed by others when experiencing or doing something.

UgurOzdemir and Tarik Tuncay (2008) conducted a study; Correlates of loneliness among university students. A sample comprising 721 Turkish university students within the age 18 to 25 was taken. The study findings indicate that there were significant relationships between the needs of economical support, social interaction and loneliness level of university students.

The study conducted by Preston et al., (2021) aims to measure the fear of negative evaluation and suicidal ideation among college students in a sample of 1816 participants from 10 universities. Results showed that FNE was significantly associated with suicidal ideation and the positive association between FNE and suicidal ideation was strongest among individuals with higher negative urgency and lower perseverance.

HYPOTHESES

1. There will be a significant relationship between Fear of negative evaluation and emotional/social loneliness in college students.
2. There will be a significant relationship between Fear of negative evaluation and social loneliness in college students.
3. There will be a significant relationship between Fear of negative evaluation and social isolation in college students.
4. There will be a significant relationship between Fear of negative evaluation and emotional loneliness in college students.
5. There will be a significant relationship between Fear of negative evaluation and emotional isolation in college students.

OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the relationship between fear of negative evaluation and emotional/social loneliness in college students.

2. To assess the relationship between fear of negative evaluation and social loneliness in college students.
3. To assess the relationship between fear of negative evaluation and social isolation in college students.
4. To assess the relationship between fear of negative evaluation and emotional loneliness in college students.
5. To assess the relationship between fear of negative evaluation and emotional isolation in college students.

METHODOLOGY

This study is intended to find the relation between fear of negative evaluation and emotional/social loneliness. The sample size of the study is 162 college students within the age group of 18 to 25 years old, including both males and females who were asked to complete the questionnaire. The data was collected from college students of various districts including Kottayam, Pathanamthitta, Alappuzha and Ernakulam. The samples were collected using convenience sampling method. The data collection was administered using Google Form. The survey was conducted after taking consent from the participants and their demographic details were collected. The participants were assured that all the details collected from them would be kept highly confidential and used solely for research purposes. Opportunity for asking any doubts during the survey was provided. The statistical analysis used to find the correlation is Spearman rank correlation. The collected data was analyzed using SPSS-28.0.1.1(14).

The tools used for the study are Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale and Emotional/Social Loneliness Inventory. Leary (1983) had developed a 12- item Fear of Negative Evaluation Inventory (FNE), which was designed to measure one aspect of social anxiety, the fear of receiving negative evaluation from others. The brief FNE is rated on a 5 point scale in terms of how characteristic each item is of the respondent. Total scores are the sum of item responses and range from 12 to 60. The brief FNE has internal consistency reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.90. It has a validity of 0.96 when correlated with the full length FNE.

Harry Vincenzi and Fran Grabosky (1987) developed a 15-item emotional/social loneliness inventory (ESLI) to measure both loneliness and isolation from social and emotional points of view. The ESLI has four subscales: social loneliness, emotional loneliness, social isolation and emotional isolation. Scores for the subscales and total scales are obtained by simply summing pertinent score items. The ESLI exhibited test-retest reliability of 0.80 for two weeks. The ESLI has good known-groups validity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The collected data was analyzed based on the formulated objective and hypothesis. The scores of Fear Of Negative Evaluation and Emotional/Social Loneliness were assessed using Spearman bivariate correlation method. The findings have been presented in the table.

TABLE 1: Analysis of relationship between fear of negative evaluation and emotional/social loneliness among young adults

Variables	Total	Social Loneliness	Social isolation	Emotional loneliness	Emotional isolation
Fear of negative evaluation	0.159*	0.047	0.095	0.157*	0.279**

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two tailed)

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two tailed)

The analysis of relationship between fear of negative evaluation and emotional/social loneliness among young adults is shown in table 1. The fear of negative evaluation was positively correlated to emotional/social Loneliness and was found to be significant at 0.05 level of significance($r=0.159^*$). Thus, the alternative hypothesis which states that, “There will be a significant relationship between fear of negative evaluation and emotional/social loneliness in young adults” was accepted. Fear of negative evaluation has a positive correlation and significant relation with social loneliness($r=0.047$). Thereby, the alternative hypothesis which states that, “There will be a significant relationship between fear of negative evaluation and social loneliness in young adults ” was accepted. Fear of negative evaluation and emotional loneliness were found to be positively correlated and significant at 0.05 level of significance ($r=0.157^*$). Therefore the alternative hypothesis which states that, “There will be a significant relationship between fear of negative evaluation and emotional loneliness in young adults ” was accepted. A positive correlation and significant relation was established between fear of negative evaluation and emotional isolation at 0.01 level of significance($r=0.279^{**}$). Thus, the alternative hypothesis which states that, “There will be a significant relationship between fear of negative evaluation and emotional isolation in young adults ” was accepted. The fear of negative evaluation was positively correlated with social isolation but was found to be not significant ($r=0.095$). Therefore the alternative hypothesis which states that, “ There will be a significant relationship between fear of negative evaluation and social isolation in young adults ” was rejected. As the relation between Fear of negative evaluation and emotional/social loneliness were examined in the study, a positive and significant relationship was found between Fear of negative evaluation and emotional/social loneliness. These findings were consistent with the results in the study conducted by Antonija Maričić and Marina Štambuk (2015), where they found a relationship between social anxiety and loneliness. A significant and positive correlation was found between social loneliness and fear of negative evaluation indicating that the individuals having fear of negative evaluation have difficulty in forming and maintaining meaningful social relationships which is consistent with the result of the study by Geukenset al.,(2020), where they found a relationship between loneliness and fear of negative evaluation. A positive correlation which is not significant was found between social isolation and fear of negative evaluation which shows that people with high levels of fear of negative evaluation often restrains themselves from recovering their sense of belonging which is somewhat consistent with the study conducted by Tanaka & Ikegami (2015). A significant and positive correlation was found between emotional loneliness and fear of negative evaluation indicating that an increase in the fear of loss of social approval leads to an increased emotional loneliness in young adults which is consistent with the study conducted by Liu et al.,(2020). A significant and positive correlation was found between emotional isolation and fear of negative evaluation from which it can be inferred that the degree to which the participants are bothered by an unfavorable evaluation from others leads to emotional isolation in them which is supported by the study led by Uğuret al.,(2021). It was found that fear of negative evaluation has a considerable amount of influence in causing emotional as well as social loneliness in young adults. When people fear negative evaluations and judgements, they often tend to isolate themselves from others, thereby causing loneliness which can adversely affect their psychological well being.

CONCLUSION

Findings revealed that a significant relationship exists between fear of negative evaluation and emotional /social loneliness in young adults. Thus, fear of negative evaluation had an impact on the level of loneliness in young adults.

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