

Relationship Between Stress and Social Anxiety Among Freshman Year Students

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ABSTRACT

Transitioning to college from high school can be one of the major areas of stress. Many college students find changing environment leads them to face more stress, and anywhere from twenty to fifty percent of college students showcase social anxiety, especially after Covid-19 since the students are no longer habitual to physical educational settings and creating new social networks. The lack of exposure to an outdoor educational setup amongst students from the past two years might induce stress and social anxiety. The aim of this study was to study the relationship of stress and social anxiety among freshman year students, to investigate whether male freshman year students differ from female freshman year students on stress to investigate whether male freshman year students differ from female freshman year students on social anxiety. The study was done on 115 freshmen year college students between 18-21 years using the Perceived Stress Scale and The Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale. The results of the study indicated a positive correlation between stress and social anxiety among freshman year students, however no difference was found between stress and social anxiety among the male and female population.

Keywords: *Freshmen, Social Anxiety, Stress*

Transitioning from high school to college is a big life change for many young people. Attending college provides students with opportunities for learning experiences and psychological development (Tao, et al., 2000). However, entering college is a source of distress and can be a severe stressor (Gall, Evans & Bellerose, 2000). Academic demands increase and new social relationships are established (Tao et al., 2000). Students are often unsure if they can meet these requirements (Dwyer & Cummings, 2001). For students moving away from home, the transition can result in lower academic performance and increased psychological distress. Social support and self-esteem are important resources for adolescents transitioning to college. Low ratings among students can lead to social unrest. Self-esteem is known to be involved in social anxiety (Arlin, 2020)

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Relationship Between Stress and Social Anxiety Among Freshman Year Students

Especially in the first year, you will face various difficulties. First semester students are also called freshmen. They see college courses as new experiences and most of them face many challenges in adjusting to new experiences in life (Garfield, 2015). The first year is full of emotions and obstacles. Nearly all students experience some degree of stress and social anxiety during their freshman year.

Stress:

Stress can be defined as a physiological or psychological response to internal or external stressors. Stress involves changes that affect almost every system in the body, affecting how people feel and behave (American Psychological Association, (2003). A mental health condition characterized by the fear of being observed or recognized by others. Anxiety affects everyone differently and for different reasons. People respond to stress and social anxiety in different ways. increase. Fook and Sidhu (2015) identified eight major learning challenges facing higher education students.

Cognitive knowledge, being an active learner, coping with reading material, classroom issues, language barriers, time management, burden sharing, cultural differences in higher education. Stress is commonly associated with her two things:

The psychological perception of pressure and the body's response to it, involving multiple systems, from metabolism to muscle to memory. All life systems require some degree of stress. It is the means by which they face and respond to the challenges and uncertainties of existence. Perceiving danger triggers an automatic response system, known as the fight-or-flight response, which is activated by hormonal signals and prepares the animal to meet the threat or flee. (Walter, 1929).

Social anxiety:

Students with social anxiety often experience loneliness and isolation and report lower life satisfaction and happiness compared to students without social anxiety. The late teens and early twenties is also the time when many students start experimenting with alcohol. This can be a slippery slope for students with social anxiety who may use alcohol to calm their nerves. Another important part of college life is college preparation. Students with social anxiety often find it difficult to take these first steps and, when given the opportunity, may refuse it outright. Despite this, fewer and fewer people with social anxiety disorder seek treatment.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Anely A. (2020) studied social anxiety and its impact on academic achievement. Study measures the participant's level of social anxiety using an instrument called Social Phobia Inventory Test/ Scale (SPIN) was used. The data was analyzed using SPSS version 24. Based on this scale, 124 participants were found socially anxious. t-test, Pearson correlation and percentage were used to analyze the data. Results showed that social anxiety correlated negatively and significantly.

Yang C., et.al. (2019) studied College students' stress and health in the COVID-19 pandemic: The role of academic workload, separation from school, and fears of contagion. Academic workload, psychological separation from school, and fear of contagion were positively associated with the perceived stress and negatively associated with physical and psychological health. In addition, perceived stress is a key mechanism in the relationships between three stressors and two forms of health. This study makes not only unique theoretical contributions to the stress and health literature during the COVID-19 outbreak

Relationship Between Stress and Social Anxiety Among Freshman Year Students

but also offers novel practical implications for joint efforts from all circles of society to ensure students' health.

Russell G. and Topham P. (2012) in a study determined the impact of social anxiety on student learning and wellbeing in higher education. Results indicate that the study found emotional distress was evident in the high frequency of reported stress and anxiety with about one-third of students experiencing depression, loneliness and difficulty with social relationships. The findings also show that students believed their learning and performance in the classroom was affected by associated thought-blocking, excessive self-focused attention and physical effects such as blushing and stammering. Despite obvious distress and anxiety, many students felt unable or unwilling to seek help, citing worry that their problems would not be taken seriously by their personal tutor due to lack of understanding. Results suggested that the best interests of the socially anxious student to promote engagement in public speaking and group interaction in order to develop confidence and skills in public speaking and anxiety-management.

Geng G. and Midford R. (2015) investigated First Year Education Students' Stress Level using Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) Results from the PSS-10 and questionnaire found that the first-year education students had higher stress levels than other years' education students. Contributing stressors included the following: academic work commitment, completing placement and related performance assessments in schools and universities, lack of a good understanding of the teaching profession, such as understanding and applying classroom management techniques, and working with mentor teachers and conflicting work and family commitments.

McLean L., Gaul D. & Penco R. (2022) examined the role of Perceived Social Support and Stress of 1st Year Students in Ireland in the sample consisted of 368 students in their first semester at university using The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS). This research identified that the majority of students reported experiencing stress during the initial weeks of commencing university, with female students reporting significantly higher levels than male students.

Pranav D., (2019) investigated Prevalence of social anxiety disorder and its determinants among undergraduate medical students of east delhi. The result showed that social anxiety was significantly associated in students with dissatisfaction in body image perception and it also revealed that social anxiety was significantly associated with dissatisfaction with academic performance which is a consequence of social anxiety itself. Study suggested that adequate information and awareness about the disorder and making provision for appropriate supportive and counseling facilities are urgently required to improve the mental health of students.

Hakami R., Mahfouz S., and Areeshi N. (2017) studied social anxiety and its impact in undergraduate students at Jazan University, Saudi Arabia using SPIN (Social Phobia Inventory) and LSAS (Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale). The result of the study confirms that Social Anxiety disorder has a quiet high prevalence and marked impact on the quality of university students. The study suggested that Early detection and appropriate treatment will help in reducing the bad consequences of this disorder.

Ahmed R. (2012) aimed at prevalence and Associated factors using of Social Anxiety and Phobia among University students using LSAS (Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale) This study

Relationship Between Stress and Social Anxiety Among Freshman Year Students

showed that more females than males suffer from social anxiety. There was no gender difference in the prevalence of social phobia in this study, a finding similar to studies of college students in other countries. In this study, smoking significantly influences the social anxiety among university student. Study Recommended That the high prevalence of phobia among university students needs education about social phobia and its impact and for the development of more widely available treatment resources for persons with social phobia. Thus, early diagnosis of first social anxiety symptoms may assist in the prevention of more severe psychiatric symptoms. The study findings are of interest and national study should investigate, in a more detailed manner, the pattern of risk factors associated with phobias in children.

The study by Garrett R., Liu S., PhD (2017) examine changes in stress during first semester among freshmen undergraduates and to identify predictors of stress (coping strategies, emotional states and quality of sleep). Result showed that Stress was elevated during examinations periods. Females reported a greater stress level than males, Increased stress level was significantly associated with lower sleep quality and greater negative emotions (fear, anger). Study found that Exercise was an effective stress copying strategy while other coping methods (Internet usage, meditation and selfisolation) were associated with higher stress. Social media usage did not influence stress level.

Need for study

Transitioning to college from high school can be one of the major areas of stress. Many college students find changing environment leads them to face more stress, and anywhere from twenty to fifty percent of college students showcase social anxiety, especially after Covid-19 since the students are no longer habitual to physical educational settings and creating new social networks. The lack of exposure to an outdoor educational setup amongst students from the past two years might induce stress and social anxiety.

The purpose of this study is to examine the social anxiety and stress faced by college students on academic performance during their first year because their Social anxiety and stress amongst college students continue to increase, causing difficulty with social skills, academic performance as well as managing everyday aspects of being a student.

METHODOLOGY

This area would give details regarding research problem, objectives, hypotheses, research design, sample, description and administration of tools for data collection.

Research problem

- The problem of the investigation was to study the relationship between stress and social anxiety of freshman year students.
- Keeping these in view following objectives is formed.

Objective

- To investigate whether male freshman year students differ from female freshman year students on stress.
- To investigate whether male freshman year students differ from female freshman year students on social anxiety.
- To study the relationship of stress and social anxiety among freshman year students.

Relationship Between Stress and Social Anxiety Among Freshman Year Students

Hypothesis

- Hypotheses were formulated for the present study based on the reviews of previous studies.
- Female freshman year students would differ significantly from male freshman year students on stress.
- Female freshman year students would differ significantly from male freshman year students on social anxiety.
- Social anxiety would be significantly related to the stress of freshman year students.

Research design

Across-sectional research design was used to collect and analyze data for the present study.

Sample

- For this study the students were selected non-randomly and purposive sampling procedure was employed for the study.
- There were totally 115 freshman students of whom 31 were men and 81 women. The age range was between 18-21 years. The majority of the young adults were unmarried doing graduation. The monthly income of the family was majorly upper middle class.
- Following inclusion and exclusion criteria were followed while drawing the sample for the study.

Inclusion criteria

- Only those freshman students who were willing or had given consent to be part of the research study were included.
- Only those freshman students between the age group of 18-21 years were included.

Exclusion criteria

- Those freshman students who were on treatment for major psychological problems were excluded.

Tools

The tools used in this study were

S. NO.	Tools used	Variables measured
1	Perceived Stress Scale	Stress
2	The brief fear of negative emotion	Anxiety

Description of tools

Perceived Stress Scale (Sheldon Cohen, 1988)

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) is the most widely used psychological instrument for measuring the perception of stress. It is a measure of the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful. Items were designed to tap how unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloaded respondents find their lives. The scale also includes a number of direct queries about current levels of experienced stress. The PSS was designed for use in community samples with at least a junior high school education. The items are easy to understand, and the response alternatives are simple to grasp.

Relationship Between Stress and Social Anxiety Among Freshman Year Students

The questions are of a general nature and hence are relatively free of content specific to any subpopulation group. The questions in the PSS ask about feelings and thoughts during the last month. In each case, respondents are asked how often they felt a certain way.

Scoring:

PSS scores are obtained by reversing responses (e.g., 0 = 4, 1 = 3, 2 = 2, 3 = 1 & 4 = 0) to the four positively stated items (items 4, 5, 7, & 8) and then summing across all scale items.

Social anxiety:

The Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation (BFNE)

The Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (BFNE) is a measure of a person's tolerance for the possibility they might be judged disparagingly or hostilely by others. This scale measures fear of negative evaluation from others, hallmark criteria for the diagnosis of social phobia and other disorders, and is relevant to the study of human social behaviour in general. With questions derived nearly verbatim from the 30-item Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) Scale (Watson & Friend, 1969), the 12-item BFNE Scale has the practical advantage of brevity and has become a frequently used instrument in social anxiety research. Leary (1983) was the first one who established the psychometric properties of the BFNE Scale among a sample of college students. The BFNE Scale was highly correlated with the 30-item FNE Scale ($r = 0.96$). Internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.96$) and three-week test-retest reliability (0.75) has been reported. (Leary, 1983).

Scoring:

The respondent indicates the extent to which each item describes himself or herself on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 5. "Not all characteristic of me" carries one point; "Slightly characteristic of me" carries two points; "Moderately characteristic of me" carries three points;

"Very characteristic of me" carries four points. "Extremely characteristic of me" carries five points. Statements 2, 4, 7 and 10 are reverse scored.

Statistical Analysis

The relationship between dependent variables will be computed using Pearson product moment correlation coefficient with statistical analysis of the data for which SPSS – version 20 will be used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Details of the statistical analysis would be presented and discussed in the following sections.

Gender difference on Stress: The student t-test was employed for examining the significance of gender difference on Stress among freshman year students.

Table 4.1: T- values, Mean and Standard Deviation of Male and Female students on Stress

S. No	Variable	Groups	Mean Value (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	t-value	P value
1	Stress	Male	19.53	4.621	.908	.420(NS)
		Female	20.37	4.325		

****Significant at $p < 0.05$**

Relationship Between Stress and Social Anxiety Among Freshman Year Students

According to Table 4.1 depicts that there is no gender difference seen on stress as t value=.908 at p value= .420 which is non-significant. The hypothesis, **Female freshman year students would differ significantly from male freshman year students on stress (hypothesis 1) was not accepted.**

Gender difference on Social Anxiety:The student t-test was employed for examining the significance of gender difference on social anxiety among freshman year students.

Table 4.2: T- value, Mean and Standard Deviation of Male and Female students Social Anxiety Scale

S. No	Variable	Groups	Mean Value (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	t-value	p-value
1	Social-anxiety	Male	33.31	8.050	.809	.366(NS)
		Female	34.80	9.137		

***Significant at $p < 0.05$*

According to Table 4.2 there is no gender difference on the level of social anxiety faced by freshman year as t value is .809 and p value is .366 which is non-significant. The hypothesis, **Female freshman year students would differ significantly from male freshman year students on social anxiety (hypothesis 2) was not accepted.**

The Pearson Correlation test was employed for examining the significance of Stress and Social Anxiety

Table 4.3: Correlation value of Stress and Social anxiety

Variable	Social Anxiety
Stress	.386**

***Significant at 0.01 level*

According to table 4.3, there was significant relationship between Stress and social anxiety among freshman year student as $R = .386^{**}$. The hypothesis, **social anxiety would be significantly related to the stress of freshman year students was accepted. (Hypothesis 3)**

The study was to understand the relationship between stress and social anxiety among freshman year students. As per the review of literature, in a previously conducted study by McLean L. et.al, (2022) in Ireland, majority of students reported experiencing stress during the initial weeks of commencing university from the study of the sample consisted of 368 freshman year students using Perceived Stress Scale. Hence to assess the relationship between stress and social anxiety among freshman year student, the students were selected non-randomly and purposive sampling procedure was employed for the study.

There were totally 115 freshman students of whom 31 were men and 81 women. The age range was between 18-21 years. The majority of the young adults were unmarried doing graduation. The monthly income of the family was majorly upper middle class. Analysis of the current study has revealed that there was no significant difference on male and female on stress as t value=.908 at p value= .420 which is greater than 0.005. It depicts that both male and female can face equal level of stress, therefore according to my result, Stress does not play any role on gender differences. Some of the items on which students scored high were:

Relationship Between Stress and Social Anxiety Among Freshman Year Students

- Item 1- In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly.
- Item 2- In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your
- Item 3- In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and “stressed”?
- Item 9- In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that were outside of your control?
- Item 10- In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

There was no significant difference on male and female on Social Anxiety as t value is .809 and p value is .366 which is non-significant. The result of my study shows that social anxiety is common to both genders. There is no specific gender that faces Social Anxiety more or less. Some of the items of Brief fear of negative emotion scale on which students scored high was:

- Item 8- When I am talking to someone, I worry about what they may be thinking about me
- Item 9- I am usually worried about what kind of impression I make.
- Item- 11 Sometimes I think I am too concerned with what other people think of me.
- Item 12 - I often worry that I will say or do the wrong things.

There was significant relationship between Stress and social anxiety among freshman year student as there is a positive correlation between stress and social anxiety. Here it depicts that Individual higher in stress will be higher in social anxiety as well.

There was significant relationship between Stress and social Anxiety among freshman year students. There was no significant relationship between Male and Female on the level of Stress and there is no significance difference between male and female on the level of anxiety as well.

Transitioning from high school to college can be a big change for students as they embark on their own. Many college students find changing environment leads them to face more stress, After Covid-19 since the students are no longer habitual to physical educational settings and creating new social networks. Therefore, socializing and making new friends can be bit difficult for them. The lack of exposure to an outdoor educational setup amongst students from the past two years might induce stress and social anxiety. Moving away from family and friends for the first time, stressing over this new life chapter and today's uncertainties, from academic performance to developing strong interpersonal skills, which can be challenging They are likely to experience the ups and downs of emotional and practical challenges associated with college life.

Struggling to develop habits such as time management, prioritization, and staying healthy is difficult to keep up with them all together. Acclimating to academic expectations that may be more challenging than anticipated, managing a level of social and cultural diversity that may be different from the communities with which they are most familiar. One of the major areas of stress and social anxiety can be comparing oneself to others and becoming discouraged.

CONCLUSION

In the present study the Stress among freshman year students found to be positively correlated with Social Anxiety which means that Individual higher in stress will be higher in social anxiety as well.

Limitation

- The sample size of the study was small.
- Other factors such as academic performance of students could have been studied in the present.

Clinical implication

Many studies suggest that students during freshman year faces stress and social anxiety. Therefore, Stress and social anxiety can be reduced by practice by taking small steps to approach social anxiety and stress-provoking situations. By emailing the professor for help or by Practicing this skill over the summer by participating in pre-college programs on campus. It can also be reduced by maintain healthy eating habits, consistent exercise, and regular sleep without the structure of home. But self-care behaviors like these are extremely important for regulating mood and helping people cope with stress. Many colleges offer resources to help students navigate the initial transition to campus and cope with stress. Investigate campus resources for academic advising, study support, peer counseling, and student mental health.

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Relationship Between Stress and Social Anxiety Among Freshman Year Students

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Relationship Between Stress and Social Anxiety Among Freshman Year Students

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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