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Research Paper

Relationship between Fear of Negative Evaluation and Self Esteem among Young Adults

Najah Ummer[1]*

ABSTRACT

People with high fear of negative evaluation have a lot of difficulty interacting with people due to the fear of being scrutinized or judged as evident in the study. In the present study, the researcher examines the relationship between Fear of negative Evaluation and Self Esteem among Young Adults. The data was collected using the Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale by Leary, M. R. (1983) and the State Self Esteem Scale by Heatherton and Polivy (1991), analyzed the collected data using statistical tests like correlation and t-test using SPSS version 22. The results revealed that, Fear of negative Evaluation and Self Esteem among Young Adults are negatively correlated, Fear of negative Evaluation is higher in women than in men. Also, self-esteem is higher in males than females. Finally, the study recommends proper counseling and psychological assistance for young adults with low self-esteem and high fear of negative evaluation.

***Keywords:** Fear of Negative Evaluation, Self Esteem, Young Adults, Social Anxiety*

The purpose of this research is to delve into the intricate relationship between fear of negative evaluation (FNE) and self-esteem among young adults. Fear of negative evaluation is a psychological construct characterized by apprehension about others' evaluations, distress over potential negative evaluations, and the anticipation of being judged unfavorably (Watson & Friend, 1969). This fear roots from social anxiety, causing individuals to develop insecurities and a lack of confidence, ultimately impacting their self-esteem. The fear of negative evaluation is considered a hallmark of social anxiety, a common mental disorder that significantly affects daily life and interpersonal relationships (Jefferson, 2001).

Young adults with high levels of fear of negative evaluation often perceive themselves as being negatively judged by others, leading to avoidance of situations where evaluation may occur. This avoidance, in turn, contributes to the development of social anxiety (Iqbal, 2018). The study aims to explore the impact of fear of negative evaluation on various psychological variables, including perfectionism, self-regulation, self-reinforcement, depression, and behavioral responses. Understanding these relationships is crucial, especially for university

[1]Student Counsellor, Centre for Counselling and Health Services (CCHS) & CHRIST (Deemed to be University), Pune Lavasa Campus
*Corresponding Author

students who frequently find themselves in situations where they are evaluated by their peers, potentially intensifying feelings of anxiety (Iqbal, 2018).

Moreover, social anxiety, a component of fear of negative evaluation, is linked to a range of symptoms such as sweating, palpitations, shaking, and respiratory distress (Chopra, D. et. al., 2021). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) criteria for social anxiety disorder highlight the persistent fear or anxiety in social situations, leading to avoidance and significant interference with daily life (Hofmann, 2007). Social anxiety disorder not only impedes individuals from participating in everyday social interactions but also contributes to low self-esteem, negative thoughts, and sensitivity to criticism.

On the other side of the relationship, self-esteem plays a pivotal role in an individual's mental health. It is defined as the overall positive evaluation of oneself, reflecting perceptions of physical self-image, accomplishments, capabilities, and how others view and respond to that person (Rosenberg, 1965; Sedikides, C., & Gregg, A. 2003). High self-esteem is considered essential for mental well-being, while low self-esteem is often associated with symptoms of depression and feelings of worthlessness (Murphy et al., 2005). The formation of self-esteem is a complex process influenced by factors such as familial environment and early childhood experiences (Talib et al., 2011). Adolescence, in particular, is a critical period for the development of self-esteem, with the potential for both positive and negative influences (Mogonea & Mogonea, 2014). Theories by Maslow and Rogers emphasize the significance of self-esteem as a fundamental human need, essential for personal growth and fulfillment (Maslow, 1968; Rogers, 1980).

In conclusion, this research seeks to unravel the intricate relationship between fear of negative evaluation and self-esteem among young adults. By exploring the impact of fear of negative evaluation on various psychological variables and understanding how social anxiety and self-esteem are intertwined, this study aims to contribute valuable insights for addressing the mental health challenges faced by the youth.

Need and Significance of The Study
This study aims to explore the significant connection between fear of negative evaluation and low self-esteem in young adults. Understanding this relationship is crucial, as low self-esteem plays a pivotal role in social anxiety and various other challenges related to interpersonal interactions. The research intends to shed light on the correlation between fear of negative evaluation and self-esteem, emphasizing the potential preventive role of high self-esteem in the development of social phobia. Low self-esteem not only contributes significantly to social anxiety but also correlates with various challenges, including difficulties in interpersonal interactions. By addressing the impact of low self-esteem on individuals and their ability to function socially, the study seeks to provide valuable insights that can assist those struggling with very low self-esteem, potentially alleviating anxiety and preventing the onset of social anxiety. Ultimately, the research is undertaken with the purpose of aiding individuals in these categories, contributing to a better understanding of their experiences and fostering potential avenues for support.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is an attempt to understand how Fear of Negative Evaluation is related to Self-Esteem among Young Adults. The study also aims to understand if there is a gender difference in Fear of Negative Evaluation among youth and if there is a gender difference in Self Esteem among youth. 182 young adults (98 males and 84 females) from all parts of

Kerala, a southern state of India were chosen for the study using convenience sampling. The hypotheses of the study were:

- H1 - There is a significant relationship between Fear of Negative Evaluation and Self-Esteem among Young Adults.
- H2 - There is a significant gender difference in Fear of Negative Evaluation among Young Adults.
- H3 - There is a significant gender difference in Self-Esteem among Young Adults.

The study was conducted using the tools, Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (BFNE) by Leary (1983) which consisted of 12 statements and each item can be rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = Not at all characteristic of me and 5 = Extremely characteristic of me) and The State Self-Esteem Scale (SSES) by Heatherton and Polivy (1991) is a 20-item Likert-type scale designed for measuring temporary changes in individual self-esteem. There are three self-esteem factors in the scale: Academic Performance, Social Evaluation, and Appearance. The scale consisted of 20 items on the scale that can be rated on a Likert-type scale (1 = Not at all to 5 = Extremely). Statistical analyses used for the study were mean, range and standard deviation from descriptive statistics and Independent sample t-test and Correlation analyses from inferential statistics. The data was collected using online forms. Before filling out the questionnaire, informed consent was taken from the participants. The privacy and confidentiality of the responses, as well as the identities of the participants, were assured. Participants were reassured that their responses would be evaluated as a group rather than individually. The subject was informed and made aware that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any moment without any penalty.

RESULT
Table 1: Mean, SD, skewness and kurtosis of study variables

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Skew	SE	Kurt	SE
FNE	182	32.12	4.40	0.397	0.180	-.001	0.358
SE	182	71.13	11.99	-.271	0.180	-.431	0.358

Table 1 shows the mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis of the study variables. It is depicted that the mean and SD of Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) are 32.12 and 4.40 respectively. The mean and SD of Self-Esteem (SE) are 71.13 and 11.99 respectively.

Skewness values for all the study variables falls between the acceptable range of +1 and -1 (FNE = .397 and SE = -.271) and the kurtosis values for all the study variables falls between the acceptable range of +3 and -3 (FNE = -.001 and SE =-.431). So, it is assumed that data are normally distributed.

Table 2: Reliability of the scales

Scale	Cronbach's alpha	N items
FNE	0.708	12
SE	0.863	20

Table 2 shows the reliability of the study scales. The reliability of fear of negative evaluation and self-esteem are .708 and .863 respectively. Both the scale showed acceptable level of reliability.

Table 3: Pearson product moment correlation for relationship between fear of negative evaluation and self-esteem among young adults

Scale	FFE	SE
FNE	1	-.574**
SE	-.574**	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 3 shows the product moment correlation between the study variables. The correlation coefficient was found to be -0.574 which indicates a negative correlation between fear of negative evaluation and self-esteem among young adults.

It is depicted that the study variables are correlated with a 0.01 significance level (r= -.574, p <.01). Thus, the hypothesis H1 is accepted which means there is a significant relationship between fear of negative evaluation and self-esteem. As self-esteem increases, fear of negative evaluation decreases.

Table 4 Mean, SD and t-value for fear of negative evaluation on self-esteem (N=182).

Variable	Gender	Mean	SD	DF	t-value
FFE	Male	31.683	4.316	180	-1.452
	Female	32.631	4.471		
SE	Male	72.837	12.405	180	2.083*
	Female	69.154	11.252		

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 4 compares fear of negative evaluation on self-esteem based on gender. It depicted that there is a significant mean difference between males and females in terms of fear of negative evaluation (t= 180, p< 0.05) with males having higher mean (males=31.683, females =32.631). It depicted that the fear of negative evaluation among males and females (t= .083, p < 0.05) with females having a higher mean (males= 72.837, females= 69.154). Thus, the hypothesis H2 is accepted and the hypothesis H3 is rejected.

DISCUSSION

From the result, it is evident that fear of negative evaluation and self-esteem are negatively related, i.e., a high level of fear of negative evaluation causes a decrease in self-esteem. Fear of negative evaluation is considered to be a hallmark of social anxiety. An individual who has high fear of negative evaluation is someone who is worried of how others will perceive them, which leads to feelings of embarrassment, inadequacy, inferiority, depression and humiliation. Social anxiety describes feelings of intense nervousness and self-consciousness that sufferers experience during one-on-one meetings or group social gatherings. Social anxiety affects the self-esteem of a person in negative ways. In this study, the sample is young adults and they are observed to be possessing high fear of being negatively evaluated. So, it is obvious that they had low self-esteem.

Studies on these topics have been conducted by Gang Cheng, Dajun Zhang and Fangyuan Ding in 2015 on "Self-esteem and fear of negative evaluation as mediators between family socioeconomic status and social anxiety in Chinese emerging adults". The following results were found from the study: The emerging adults belonging to families with low SES are at an increased risk of social anxiety and lower family SES causes lower self-esteem, which, in turn, serves to enhance the levels of FNE, thereby increasing social anxiety.

Atasoy, M., Karabulut, E. O., & YalÃ§Inkaya, A. (2016b) have also conducted a study "Study on fear of negative evaluation, and social appearance anxiety of university students engaged in futsal" by using a screening model with an eye to examine the fear of negative evaluation, and social appearance anxiety of sportsmen engaged in futsal. The research was carried out on teams which participated in the Futsal Competitions organized through Turkey University Sports Federation at Physical Education and Sports College of Ahi Evran University. At the end of the research, it was found that women sportsmen have a greater fear of negative evaluation than men while significant correlation was not detected between other variables. The research result also has revealed the fact that sportsmen engaged in futsal had low social appearance anxiety and there was not a significant relationship between variables.

Another study by Liu X et. al. (2020) in the study "The roles of fear of negative evaluation and social anxiety in the relationship between self-compassion and loneliness: a serial mediation model" show the roles of fear of negative evaluation and social anxiety in the relationship between self-compassion and loneliness. The results suggested that self-compassion was negatively associated with loneliness, and social anxiety served as a mediator in the relationship. Besides, we found that the fear of negative evaluation and social anxiety serially mediated the negative association. Specifically, self-compassionate adolescents reported less fear of negative evaluation, which resulted in decreased social anxiety symptoms. In turn, the decreased social anxiety was linked to reduced feelings of loneliness.

During the past two decades, a large number of studies on age and gender differences in self-esteem have found that men have higher self-esteem than women and that both men and women show age-graded increases in self-esteem.

Bleidorn W. et. al. analyzed survey data from over 985,000 men and women ages 16-45 from 48 countries in the study "Age and Gender Differences in Self-Esteem — A Cross-Cultural Window". The data were collected from July 1999 to December 2009 as part of the Gosling-Potter Internet Personality Project. The researchers compared self-reported self-esteem, gender and age across the 48 nations in their study.

In general, the researchers found that self-esteem tended to increase with age, from adolescence to adulthood, and that men at every age tended to have higher levels of self-esteem than women worldwide.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between Fear of Negative Evaluation and Self-Esteem among young adults. The study involved 182 participants (98 males and 84 females) from various regions of Kerala, India. The study focused on two variables: Fear of Negative Evaluation and Self-Esteem. To fulfill the study's objectives, which were to identify the relationship between Fear of Negative Evaluation and Self-Esteem among young adults and to determine gender differences in Fear of Negative Evaluation and Self-Esteem, convenient sampling was employed as the sampling technique. Inferential and descriptive statistics, such as mean, range, standard deviation, correlation, and independent sample t-test, were used for data analysis. The results concluded that fear of negative evaluation and self-esteem are negatively correlated among young adults, suggesting that as self-esteem increases, the fear of negative evaluation decreases. The study also found that fear of negative evaluation is slightly higher in females than in males, and males exhibit

higher self-esteem than women. Consequently, efforts can be made to enhance self-esteem levels in young adults, potentially reducing their fear of negative evaluation and social anxiety. However, it's essential to note that the sample size (N = 182) may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, reliance on self-reporting questionnaires introduces the possibility of social desirability bias influencing the results. Further research with a larger sample size in an Indian context is recommended to extend the findings to a broader population. Given the study's significance at the 0.01 and 0.05 levels, the results can be generalized to the study population with 99 and 95 percent confidence, respectively.

Limitations

The study's findings should be interpreted in the context of some limitations. Firstly, the relatively small sample size, consisting of participants from various online platforms, hinders the generalizability of the results to the broader population. The study's focus on a specific age group within Kerala further narrows the scope of applicability. An additional concern arises from the data collection method, as relying on various online platforms introduces the potential for response manipulation. The credibility and truthfulness of the study depend on the honesty of the individuals who participated in the questionnaire, creating a potential source of bias.

Moreover, the study's limitation extends to its methodological approach, as it predominantly provides numerical descriptions without offering more detailed narrative accounts of human perception. This could limit the depth of understanding regarding the intricacies of the relationships explored in the study. Furthermore, the absence of a control group diminishes the study's ability to make causal inferences and establish a clear cause-and-effect relationship between the variables. Finally, the exclusion of the transgender population from the study's demographics represents a limitation, as it restricts the generalizability of the findings to a more comprehensive understanding of gender-related nuances in fear of negative evaluation and self-esteem dynamics.

Suggestions for Future Research

In light of the study's limitations, several key recommendations emerge for future research endeavors. Firstly, there is a suggestion to redesign the study with an increased sample size and the inclusion of a control group drawn from a more diverse geographical area. This expansion would enhance the study's generalizability and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between fear of negative evaluation and self-esteem across different populations. Additionally, future research efforts could delve deeper into the experiences of the population, considering factors such as socio-economic status, geographical location, and other potential correlates like stress, mental health, and psychological morbidity. This nuanced exploration would contribute to a more inclusive and thorough understanding of how fear of negative evaluation and self-esteem manifest within this specific demographic. Furthermore, it would be beneficial for future studies to explore the effectiveness of specific interventions or therapeutic approaches aimed at simultaneously addressing fear of negative evaluation and enhancing self-esteem. Such investigations could provide valuable insights into tailored strategies for improving mental well-being in individuals grappling with these interconnected concerns.

Implications

The findings of this study carry significant implications for practical applications and interventions. Firstly, recognizing the elevated fear of negative evaluation in individuals underscores the importance of offering tailored counseling and psychological assistance. By

addressing this fear, individuals can be equipped with tools to navigate social interactions more effectively, thereby contributing to their overall mental well-being. Moreover, the study underscores the reciprocal relationship between fear of negative evaluation and self-esteem, emphasizing that elevating self-esteem can serve as a protective factor. Interventions and therapeutic techniques geared toward enhancing self-esteem become crucial avenues for fostering positive self-regard and mitigating the impact of fear of negative evaluation. In addition to these implications, it is advisable to consider the potential role of group therapy or support networks, as shared experiences and mutual encouragement may further contribute to the amelioration of both fear of negative evaluation and self-esteem.

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Conflict of Interest
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