

Impact of Skin Conditions on Mental Health

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of skin conditions on the mental health of young adults by examining the detrimental effects of different beauty standards in our society. Measures such as the Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale, the Social Interaction Anxiety Scale, and the Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire were employed to assess a sample of 100 young adults with skin conditions (both males and females) selected through convenience random sampling. Karl Pearson's correlation analysis revealed significant associations between self-esteem and social interaction anxiety, self-esteem and automatic thoughts, and social interaction anxiety and automatic thoughts.

Keywords: *Skin Conditions, Self-Esteem, Social Interaction Anxiety, Automatic Thoughts*

Skin diseases are prevalent in our society and encompass a wide range of conditions caused by various factors such as infections, allergic reactions, and genetics. These diseases affect individuals across all age groups, from newborns to the elderly. Common skin conditions include rashes, dermatitis, acne, eczema, psoriasis, and various types of skin cancer. Treatment for these conditions often involves long-term medications and specialized skin treatments.

In society, skincare has become a profitable industry, enticing individuals of all ages to search for products that promise clear skin. Companies constantly introduce new skincare products and equipment through advertisements, capitalizing on people's desire for flawless skin. However, many fail to realize that their mindset is being influenced by these companies.

In Indian society, the preference for fair skin and negative comments about melanin-rich skin perpetuate unrealistic beauty standards. These standards can lead to insecurity in future generations, as people believe their beauty depends solely on their skin tone. Skincare companies exploit this mindset to profit from every household, making individuals question their worth.

Beauty standards are defined by societal norms, determining what features are considered attractive. People strive to conform to these standards to be perceived as socially valuable and attractive. Those who don't fit these standards are often deemed unattractive.

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While some beauty standards are evolving, new ones are replacing them. For instance, people now focus on hair color, piercings, tattoos, and clothing styles. Yet, many fail to realize that these trends originate from within themselves.

The global skincare market holds a significant share in the economy, experiencing rapid growth among both old and young consumers. People now prioritize natural skincare products that are less harmful to themselves and the environment, shifting away from chemical-based products (Fortune Business Insight.,2021). While aging is inevitable, consumers focus on slowing down the aging process and maintaining a youthful appearance.

The skincare industry generates billions of dollars, with projections indicating substantial growth from USD 133.90 billion in 2018 to an estimated USD 200.25 billion by the end of 2026. This demonstrates the industry's rapid expansion. (Fortune Business Insight., 2021)

Unfortunately, people often overlook the damage to their skin barrier and fail to recognize the need for help until severe skin conditions arise. Those with skin conditions are forced to avoid these products to protect their skin long-term, highlighting the negative impact of unrealistic beauty standards on the skin.

Confidence is essential for pursuing dreams and living a fulfilling life. It stems from self-esteem, which acts as personal wealth throughout one's lifetime. Self-esteem fluctuates but maintaining a balanced self-esteem, akin to a balanced diet, yields positive outcomes. Taking care of the skin, a prominent aspect of beauty, has been a ritual across generations, evolving with different ingredients and products. Skincare and self-esteem are interconnected, with skincare routines enhancing the skin's glow and boosting self-concept. Unhealthy skin is often associated with low self-esteem, but it's important to note that not all individuals with unhealthy skin have low self-esteem, as people with high self-esteem can have healthy skin too.

Rosenberg (1965) defines self-esteem as an individual's positive or negative attitude and evaluation of their own thoughts, feelings, and overall sense of self. It represents a subjective perception of personal worth and values, reflecting one's confidence in their abilities and attributes. Those with self-esteem are likely to surpass their own achievements as they recognize their inherent value.

Having a healthy self-esteem is crucial for psychological well-being, but both high and low self-esteem can pose challenges. Key elements of self-esteem include self-confidence, identity, a sense of worth, and self-love. Self-esteem plays a significant role in decision-making, interpersonal relationships, overall social and psychological well-being, emotional resilience, and personal growth. It helps set boundaries in relationships and facilitates goal achievement. Conversely, low self-esteem leads to self-doubt, low confidence, and self-loathing. It has the potential to contribute to mental disorders such as anxiety, body dysmorphia, and depression, while also impacting motivation. Skin conditions often affect self-esteem as society perpetuates the notion that individuals with such conditions are unworthy. Low self-esteem is further exacerbated by negative automatic thoughts influenced by internal and external factors, including negative environments and experiences.

Automatic thoughts, as described by Soflau and David (2017), refer to surface-level, non-volitional cognitions that manifest as descriptions, inferences, or situation-specific evaluations. These thoughts are well-learned and habitually repeated, occurring without

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cognitive effort. They are also referred to as routinized thoughts, according to the American Psychological Association (APA) dictionary. The APA further explains that automatic thoughts are instantaneous, habitual, and non-conscious, influencing a person's moods and behaviors.

A key aspect of cognitive therapy is assisting individuals in recognizing and evaluating negative automatic thoughts for their presence and impact. These thoughts often lean towards negativity and can be unhelpful, irrational, or inaccurate. Negative situations contribute to these thoughts, leading individuals to feel poorly about themselves. People with skin conditions commonly experience automatic negative thoughts due to societal judgment and discrimination regarding their appearance, which can be detrimental in various aspects. When these thoughts go unchecked, they can have a significant impact on mood, behavior, and overall functioning. Believing these thoughts without question allows them to dominate our mental space, perpetuating a cycle of negativity.

Cognitive distortions, as described by Dozois and Beck (2008), refer to negatively biased errors in thinking that aim to heighten susceptibility to depression. The American Psychological Association (APA) defines cognitive distortions as faulty or inaccurate thinking, perception, or belief.

Different societies and cultures exist worldwide, shaping our social interactions. However, these interactions can sometimes trigger anxiety, particularly in the context of overwhelming social situations. Society often judges individuals based on their appearance, including clothing, facial features, body shape, and skin condition, with the latter being a significant factor. People with skin conditions tend to withdraw from social interactions due to fear of judgment and constant inquiries solely about their skin. Curiosity from others resembles a scientific search for answers, further impacting their mental well-being. As a result, affected individuals avoid socializing, leading to increased social interaction anxiety.

Social interaction anxiety encompasses two types of situations: those involving engaging in social interactions with others (e.g., initiating and maintaining conversations) and those involving being observed or scrutinized by others (e.g., public speaking or eating in public) (Liebowitz, 1987; Mattick & Clark, 1998). These situations require different sets of skills, and individuals with social anxiety may fear either one, both, or a combination of these situations (Heimberg, Mueller, Holt, Hope & Liebowitz, 1992).

Social anxiety disorder (SAD) is characterized by intense fear or anxiety in social situations where individuals could be observed or judged by others (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The diagnostic criteria for SAD in DSM-V (2013) include marked fear or anxiety in one or more social situations, such as social interactions (e.g., conversations, meeting new people), being observed (e.g., eating or drinking), and performing in front of others (e.g., giving a speech). The fear, anxiety, or avoidance is persistent and typically lasts for at least six months.

Social anxiety is characterized by a fear, anxiety, or avoidance that causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. This fear, anxiety, or avoidance is not attributed to the physiological effects of substances or other medical conditions. It is also distinct from symptoms of other mental disorders such as panic disorder, body dysmorphic disorder, or autism spectrum disorder. If there is a coexisting medical condition, the fear, anxiety, or avoidance must be unrelated or

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excessive. Specific mention should be made if the fear is limited to speaking or performing in public. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), social anxiety involves a fear of social situations where embarrassment may occur or where there is a risk of negative evaluation by others. It encompasses apprehension about one's social status, role, and behaviour. When anxiety significantly affects an individual's well-being or functioning, a diagnosis of social phobia may be appropriate (Dictionary.apa.org).

Hypotheses

- **H01:** There is a significant relationship between Self-Esteem and Automatic Thoughts in young adult, who have skin conditions.
- **H02:** There is a significant relationship between Self-Esteem and Social interaction anxiety among young adults, who have skin conditions.
- **H03:** There is a significant relationship between Social Interaction Anxiety and Automatic Thoughts among young adults, who have skin conditions

Objectives

- To examine relationship between Self-Esteem and Automatic Thoughts.
- To examine relationship between Self-Esteem and Social Interaction Anxiety.
- To examine relationship between Social Interaction Anxiety and Automatic thoughts.

Current Study

This study aims to analyse the impact of skin conditions on mental health, specifically focusing on self-esteem, automatic thoughts, and social interaction anxiety. Given the concerning impact of various skin conditions on mental well-being, further research is needed in this area. This study can serve as a valuable contribution to the understanding of how skin conditions affect mental health.

Aim of the Study

To find the impact of skin conditions on mental health in young adults.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The data was acquired from a sample of 100 young adults encompassing both males and females, all of whom presented diverse skin conditions such as Acne, Psoriasis, Skin Picking, Scleroderma, Vitiligo, among others. The participants were drawn from different regions across the globe. The selection of participants was conducted through a convenient sampling method.

Materials

- **Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale:** The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, introduced by psychologist Marshall Bertram Rosenberg in 1965 and published by Princeton University Press, is a 10-item scale measuring global self-worth. It employs a unidimensional structure, assessing positive and negative self-perceptions using a 4-point Likert scale. The scale demonstrates high internal consistency (Cronbach's coefficient of 0.81), ensuring reliable measurement. Scores ranging from 0 to 30 represent varying levels of self-esteem, with scores of 15-25 considered normal and scores below 15 indicating low self-esteem. Administration involves respondents rating their agreement with self-related statements.

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- **Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS):** The Mattick R.P and Clarke J.C scale, introduced in 1998, is a 20-item assessment that measures social anxiety related to interpersonal interactions involving scrutiny. Each item offers four response options, and reliability is assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The scale demonstrates high discriminant validity. Participants were instructed to circle a number indicating the degree to which each item reflects their personal experience. Scores range from 0 to 80, with higher scores indicating greater social anxiety.
- **Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire (ATQ):** The ATQ scale, introduced by Phillip C. Kendall and Stewn C. Hollon in 1980, is a 30-item instrument that measures the frequency of automatic negative self-statements. Each item provides five response options. The scale demonstrates excellent internal consistency, with an alpha coefficient of .97, and effectively discriminates between depressed and nondepressed individuals. It also shows good concurrent validity, as it correlates with two depression measures: the Beck Depression Inventory and the MMPI Depression scale. Participants were instructed to rate the frequency of occurrence for each thought over the past week using a scale ranging from "not at all" to "all the time." Total scores are calculated by summing all 30 items, with higher scores indicating a greater level of automatic negative self-statements and increased believability in negative thoughts.

Procedure

This study investigates the influence of automatic thoughts, social interaction anxiety, and self-esteem in individuals diagnosed with various skin conditions. The study involved distributing the relevant scales to 100 participants through a Google Form. Ethical guidelines, including adherence to informed consent rules as outlined by the American Psychological Association (APA), were followed throughout the research process. Participant confidentiality was also ensured to maintain their privacy.

Data Analysis

Statistical analysis involves the exploration of trends, patterns, and relationships using quantitative data. It plays a crucial role in interpreting the obtained data by employing various statistical techniques. One commonly used statistical tool is the Pearson correlation, which was utilized in this study. Correlation, as a statistical measure, assesses the degree of linear relationship between two variables. The correlation coefficient ranges from +1 to -1, with a value of +1 or -1 indicating a perfect linear relationship. Positive correlation occurs when both variables increase or decrease together, while negative correlation involves one variable increasing as the other decreases. A correlation coefficient of zero suggests no linear relationship between two continuous variables, while values between -1 and +1 represent varying degrees of strength in the relationship.

RESULTS

The results indicate a significant negative correlation between self-esteem and automatic thoughts ($r = -0.766$), suggesting that as self-esteem decreases, automatic negative thoughts tend to increase. Furthermore, the findings reveal a negative correlation between self-esteem and social interaction anxiety ($r = -0.514$), indicating that individuals with lower self-esteem tend to experience higher levels of social interaction anxiety. Additionally, there is a significant positive correlation between social interaction anxiety and automatic thoughts ($r = 0.503$), implying that greater social interaction anxiety is associated with an increased frequency of automatic negative thoughts.

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Table 1. Shows the correlation between Self-esteem, Social Interaction Anxiety and Automatic Thoughts in young adults.

	Self-Esteem	Automatic Thoughts	Social Interaction Anxiety
Self-Esteem	1	-.766**	-.514**
Automatic Thoughts	-.766**	1	.503**
Social Interaction Anxiety	-.514**	.503**	1

DISCUSSION

The study revealed a significant negative correlation ($r = -0.766$) between Self-esteem and Automatic thoughts in youth with skin conditions. This indicates that when Automatic thoughts tend to decrease, Self-esteem has a positive increase. Similarly, when Self-esteem decreases, there is an increase in Automatic Thoughts. Given this, participants with skin conditions might experience low Self-esteem when Automatic Thoughts increase. Automatic thoughts, which are immediate and often unacknowledged thoughts, can impact moods and behaviour. Young individuals with skin conditions may frequently experience Automatic Thoughts.

The results demonstrate that self-esteem and social interaction anxiety share a negative correlation ($r = -0.514$). These findings suggest that as social interaction anxiety rises, self-esteem tends to decrease among young adults with skin conditions. Conversely, as self-esteem increases, social interaction anxiety tends to decrease. This indicates that young adults with skin conditions might experience low self-esteem and high levels of social interaction anxiety. This could be attributed to Rosenberg's (1965) concept of self-esteem, which is defined as one's overall evaluation and positive or negative attitude towards themselves.

The study showed a significant positive correlation between social interaction anxiety and automatic thoughts ($r = 0.503$), meaning that as social interaction anxiety rises, automatic thoughts also tend to increase. This suggests that young adults with skin conditions, who experience high levels of social interaction anxiety, may also have frequent automatic negative thoughts. Social interaction anxiety is characterized by persistent fear of being judged or humiliated in social situations and interactions. This, coupled with skin conditions, can result in elevated levels of anxiety and the development of frequent negative automatic thoughts.

CONCLUSION

The study conducted has demonstrated significant relationships between self-esteem and automatic thoughts, self-esteem and social interaction anxiety, as well as social interaction anxiety and automatic thoughts, respectively. These findings suggest that the three variables self-esteem, social interaction anxiety, and automatic thoughts are interconnected, and the levels of one variable may influence the levels of the other two. Specifically, higher levels of self-esteem seem to be positively associated with lower levels of social interaction anxiety and more positive automatic thoughts, creating a virtuous cycle that promotes better mental health.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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