

# Fear of Negative Evaluation as an Element of Social Anxiety in University Students

Kriti Vashishtha, Aakansha Ranawat, Charu Babuta, Gunjan Sankhala, Malvika Sharma, Radhika Charan, Rameshwari Rathore, Saumya Jaiswal, Vipra Baid, Yashi Vijayvergiya

## Abstract

The present research was conducted to investigate the fear of negative evaluation among male and female undergraduates and post graduates of Arts and Science streams. For this purpose, a Google form was sent to 120 students of age group 18-21 (30 girls and 30 boys from arts and science stream each) PAN India. Tool used was The Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (Leary, 1983). T-test was used as the statistical techniques. The findings of the study showed that there is no significant difference in Fear of Negative Evaluation among the participants. Statistically, the null hypothesis was accepted. This implies that stream or gender has no significant difference on fear of negative evaluation.

**Keywords:** Fear of negative evaluation, Gender differences, Undergraduates, Post graduates, Arts stream, Science stream.

## Introduction

Anxiety is a common issue mostly seen in people with or around us. The worry and fear of undecided future makes an individual anxious. For instance, a lot of students go through anxiety at least once in the lifetime before examinations or some people also show anxiety during public speaking.

People facing anxiety go through various symptoms like physical symptoms (nausea, feeling dizzy, excessive use of toilet, sleeping disturbance, increased heart rate), psychological symptoms (anger and irritability, sweating, emotionally tired, mood swings, fatigue, decreased memory, difficulty in concentrating), behavioural symptoms (intentionally keeping

away from anxiety triggering stimuli, obsessive and compulsive behavior) etc. Anxiety can also be a result of past or childhood experiences, current life situation, physical and mental health problems or difficult social situations etc.

Level of anxiety varies from individual to individual. All of us face anxiety at some or the other point. It is important for the person to understand that feeling anxious at some particular situation is normal. When an individual feels anxious at a particular time, he/she gets several emotions and bodily changes at a time like sweating, stammering, biting, nails, high blood pressure. Remaining calm at a fight or flight situation helps a person to make better and effective decisions. Breathing is another technique also included in relaxation therapy which has shown better results in decision making process during an anxious situation. People with anxiety are advised to hold their breath for some time and then come to a judgment. Studies have proved that when we shift the focus of people from an anxious situation it helps them to cope up with anxiety in a better way. One can distract oneself by focusing on the wall, humming songs, observing surroundings. Through mindfulness therapy one can control the thoughts he/she is having in an anxious situation. It is used for relaxation. It is used to deal with performance anxiety and the thoughts that produce anxiety does not affect much. It is the most popular approach and has been an efficient way to reduce the fear during social situations. Part of therapy includes writing causes of anxiety in ascending order which helps to know the therapist from where he/she has to start.

### **Social anxiety**

Social Anxiety is characterized as a cognitive and effective experience that is triggered by the perception of possible evaluation by other. Although many individuals experience social anxiety and shyness, these are typically differentiated from social anxiety disorder by the impact of these on an individual's functioning and the amount of distress experienced.

One of the most prevailing forms of anxiety is social anxiety, which can develop into a disorder called social anxiety disorder. People who suffer from fear of negative evaluation tend to avoid social situations. This may result in eating difficulty and problems in public speaking which further impacts their social functioning. Social anxiety reduces the academic ability of children and adolescents, and places them at risk for insomnia, mood disorders, and problematic alcohol consumption in adulthood.

## **Fear of negative evaluation**

According to Watson and Friend (1969) fear of negative evaluation is a trait which makes the individual is nervous and stressed about others' feedback; he tries to avoid such situations and believes that other people would assess him negatively. This negative belief about oneself comes from the previous encounters and makes it difficult for the people to cope with daily living (Gill et al. 2018). We can understand that fear of negative evaluation as a trait that tends to affect the social interaction of individuals which may cause individuals to experience loneliness.

Individuals with high fear of negative evaluation would tend to feel much worse about receiving negative evaluations. Individuals with a self-compassionate mindset don't get affected by social threats and engender a positive self-feeling when life goes badly. Therefore self-compassionate individuals might not be as affected by the fear of negative evaluations.

## **Review of Literature**

Social anxiety is having a persistent fear of being judged in a negative light. A person may experience distress because of this. While the concept of fear of negative evaluation seems similar to that of social anxiety, it is, in fact, not. Fear of negative evaluation can cause social anxiety, making these ideas different. A positive relationship has been seen between social anxiety, language anxiety, academic risk-taking behavior and fear of negative evaluation (Malini & Janakavalli, 2018) A negative correlation has been found between fear of negative evaluation, and perceived autonomy support of school students (Üztemur & Servet, 2020).

Downing, Virginia, Cooper, Katelyn, Cala, Jacqueline, Gin, Logan, Brownell and Sara (2020) conducted a study college students and found that one of the major cause of atudents' anxiety and hurdle in learning is fear of negative evaluation. Though, it was observed that counseling sessions helped the students in decreasing their fear of negative evaluation. Students also go through appearance anxiety (especially those who take part in cultural events) and this even enhances their fear of negative evaluation more. (Dogan & Pinar Karacan, 2018). It was determined that the female dancers who has middle-level income and had less folk dance experience had higher average values.

Low self-esteem, self-focused attention, and even participation in social activities during college time give rise to fear of negative evaluation (Jung-

hans-Rutelonis, Ashley, Suorsa, Kristina, Tackett, Alayna, Burkley, Edward, Chaney, John, Mullins & Larry, 2015). When self-conscious predicts fear of negative evaluation, it leads to low self-esteem among undergraduates and directly affects their quality of life (Mohammed & Diab, 2015).

Studied have show grade-wise difference in the fear of negative evaluation among school students. The higher the grade, higher is the chances of fear of negative evaluation. Iqbal and Ajmal (2018) observed significant gender difference and degree difference on social anxiety and fear of negative evaluation among university students. Females and undergraduates were found to be more socially anxious than males and post graduates.

One usually studies an idea by isolating it from other ideas to understand it. However, it is also important to change perspective and check its interactions to understand it fully. Like in this case, models of interpersonal relationships suggest that the nature of social interactions and social anxiety affect each other bi-directionally. (Teachman & Allen, 2005)

Karakashian and others explored the relationship between FNE and helping behaviour. The study's findings are interesting because there was no significant difference in helping behaviour among people with different levels of FNE in a social setting. However, in a non-social setting, people with low FNE were seen to show more helping behaviour. Furthermore, males showed helping behaviour similar to females in a social environment. However, in a non-social setting, their helping behaviour decreased compared to females. The mentioned study reasoned that this outcome may have occurred because men are often conditioned to be 'providers' in society. Finally, many of us experience fear of negative evaluation and social anxiety. However, some may experience it more intensely than others. The community faces discrimination and hate crimes from their family and society, which may be the leading cause of this. The study also found a significant relationship between self-esteem, social anxiety and fear of negative evaluation.

## **Methodology**

### **Rationale**

The issue of growing anxiety among University students is a major concern currently. One of the important reasons for this can be the fear of being negatively evaluated by others. The students focus more on what others will think of them, some of the reasons for this fear can be students

are anxious about how they present themselves in society as there are certain set criteria which can be gender specific and if they fail to conform to it they start doubting themselves and their potential which increase their anxiety and they start withdrawing from any social setting. Another reason can be the pandemic that has a drastic effect on students' life be it on academic or social front. Most of them are finding it difficult to come out of their homes and socialize. It can also be because of different expectations of people from students of different streams. Thus this study is taken to see the effects of fear of negative evaluation on different genders and also on students belonging to different streams.

### **Objectives**

1. To study the fear of negative evaluation on males and females.
2. To study the fear of negative evaluation among arts and science streams.

### **Hypothesis**

1. There is no significant difference in fear of evaluation among males and females.
2. There is no significant difference in fear of evaluation in science male and female undergraduate students.
3. There is no significant difference in fear of evaluation in arts male and female undergraduate students.
4. There is no significant difference in fear of evaluation among undergraduate male students of science and arts.
5. There is no significant difference in fear of evaluation among undergraduate female students of science and arts.

### **Sample**

*Size* : 120 Students (60 Girls from Arts and Science Stream each and 60 Boys from Arts and Science Stream each)

*Age Group*: 18-21 Years

*Streams*: Science and Arts

### Inclusion Criteria

- An Indian university/ college student of 18-21 age range.
- 60 girls and 60 boys from arts and science fields each.

### Exclusion Criteria

- Students from other streams.
- Students with problems related to English (speaking, reading and writing).

### Tools for data collection & measurement

**Brief fear of negative Evaluation Scale** (Leary, 1983) has 12 items, and the subject responds on a 5-point likert type scale from 'absolutely inappropriate' to 'absolutely appropriate'. It is high on reliability and validity.

### Statistical Technique

#### t- Test Result Design

STREAM	GENDER		TOTAL
	MALE	FEMALE	
SCIENCE	30	30	60
ARTS	30	30	60

### Results

TABLE 1: Showing difference in fear of evaluation among males and females undergraduate students.

BASIS	N	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	t-VALUE
Science and Arts Males	60	34.47	9.13	1.16
Science and Arts Females	60	32.67	7.88	

The *t*-value is 1.16. The *p*-value is .250055. The result is *not* significant at  $p < .05$

**TABLE 2: Showing difference in fear of evaluation in Science male and female undergraduate students.**

BASIS	N	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	t-VALUE
Science Males	30	33	9.00	0.67
Science Females	30	31.63	6.55	

The *t*-value is 0.67. The *p*-value is .504287. The result is *not* significant at  $p < .05$ .

**TABLE 3 Showing difference in fear of evaluation in Arts male and female undergraduate students.**

BASIS	N	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	t-VALUE
Arts Males	30	35.93	9.17	0.95
Arts Females	30	33.7	9.00	

The *t*-value is 0.95. The *p*-value is .345257. The result is *not* significant at  $p < .05$ .

**TABLE 4: Showing difference in fear of evaluation among undergraduate male students of science and arts.**

BASIS	N	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	t-VALUE
Science Males	30	33	9.00	1.25
Arts Males	30	35.93	9.17	

The *t*-value is 1.25. The *p*-value is .216457. The result is *not* significant at  $p < .05$ .

**TABLE 5: Showing difference in fear of evaluation among undergraduate female students of science and arts.**

BASIS	N	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	t-VALUE
Science Females	30	31.63	6.55	1.02
Arts Females	30	33.7	9.00	

The *t*-value is 1.02. The *p*-value is .313683. The result is *not* significant at  $p < .05$ .

### Discussion

Fear of negative evaluation is about being anxious of other people's opinions, fearful of their negative opinions, and concerned that they would spread unpleasant information about oneself to others (Watson & Friend, 1969). Individuals who are afraid of unfavourable evaluation have low self-esteem and are afraid of negatively influencing their environment or face isolation from society, therefore they are continuously worried about what others will think of them (Weeks, Heimberg, Fresco, Hart, Turk, Schneider & Liebowitz, 2005). The present research studies 120 undergraduate students 30 girls from arts and science stream each and 30 boys from arts and science stream each to see whether gender difference and difference in academic streams have effect on Fear of Negative Evaluation among students. The results obtained are as follows:

Table 1 shows difference in fear of evaluation among males and females undergraduate students. Here, the *t*-value is 1.16 and the *p*-value is .250055. As  $p < .05$  thus the result is not significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference in Fear of Negative Evaluation among male and female undergraduate students. Thus, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Table 2 shows difference in fear of evaluation in Science male and female undergraduate students. Here, the *t*-value is 0.67 and the *p*-value is .504287. As  $p < .05$  thus the result is not significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference in Fear of Negative Evaluation among Male and Female undergraduate students from science stream. Thus, the null hypothesis has been accepted.



Table 3 shows difference in fear of evaluation in Arts male and female undergraduate students. Here, the  $t$ -value is 0.95 and the  $p$ -value is .345257. As  $p < .05$  thus the result is not significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference in Fear of Negative Evaluation among male and female undergraduate students from arts stream. Thus, the null hypothesis has been accepted.

Table 4 shows difference in fear of evaluation in male undergraduate students of Science and Arts. Here, the  $t$ -value is -1.25 and the  $p$ -value is .216457. As  $p < .05$  thus the result is not significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference in Fear of Negative Evaluation among male undergraduate students from science and arts stream. Thus, the null hypothesis has been accepted.

Table 5 shows difference in fear of evaluation in Female undergraduate students of Science and Arts. Here, the  $t$ -value is -1.02 and the  $p$ -value is .313683. As  $p < .05$  thus the result is not significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference in Fear of Negative Evaluation among Science and Arts Female undergraduate students. Thus, the null hypothesis has been accepted.

The results of the present study can be supported by the following previously done researches. Ajmal and Iqbal (2018) conducted a study on university students of different departments with the sample of 110 males and 120 females to check the correlation and differences between social anxiety and fear of negative evaluation among males and females and undergraduate and postgraduate students. Results revealed positive correlation between fear of negative evaluation and social anxiety. Significant difference between undergraduate and postgraduate students as well as males and females was observed. However, female students and undergraduate students have been found to be high on social anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Bussey, Trompeter and Hay (2018) studied adolescent girls and found a positive association between fear of negative evaluation and body weight. Naqvi and Khan (2016) examined the differences in fear of negative evaluation and self criticism among university students with and without obesity with a sample of 109 students with obesity and 141 without obesity ranging between the age of 18 and 25 years. The findings showed a positive relationship between fear of negative evaluation and self criticism in both university students with and without obesity and it was also observed that girls were reported to have higher internalized self-criticism in comparison to boys in both groups related to obesity.

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