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Original Paper

The Correlation of Perceived Social Support and Emotional Schemas With Students' Social Anxiety

Leila Moghtader²* Matina Shamloo¹,

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Humanities, Rasht Branch, Islamic Azad University, Rasht, Iran.
2. Psychology (MA), Department of Psychology, Faculty of Humanities, Rasht Branch, Islamic Azad University, Rasht, Iran.

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Social anxiety remembered as an annoying experience in the presence of others is one of the most common mental disorders, especially in students.

Objective: The current study aimed at determining the relationship between perceived social support and maladaptive emotional Schemas with social anxiety in students.

Materials and Methods: The current correlational analytic study was conducted on all undergraduate students of Islamic Azad University, Rasht Branch in the academic year of 2015-2016 that was 3986 people. In the current study, 351 students with social anxiety were selected using the convenient sampling method and Morgan table. The study tools included the Zimet perceived social support scale, the Leahy emotional Schemas scale, and Jerabek social anxiety questionnaire. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficient test.

Results: The mean age of students was 22.72±4.80 years according to the results of descriptive information. Most of the participants in the study (80.06%) were single. The mean of social anxiety was 68.01±13.12, social support 43.7±8.70, and emotional scheme 104.33±12.99. The results indicated a negative and significant relationship between perceived social support and social anxiety (r=-0.30, P<0.01). The relationship between emotional Schemas and social anxiety was positive and significant (r=0.44, P<0.01).

Conclusion: The results indicated that students with higher perceived social support experienced lower social anxiety. Maladaptive emotional Schemas can be associated with students' social anxiety.

* **Corresponding Author:**
Leila Moghtader, PhD.
Address: Department of Psychology, Rasht Branch, Islamic Azad University, Rasht, Iran.
Tel: +98 (911) 2303071
E-mail: moghtaderleila@yahoo.com

Highlights

● The current study aimed at determining the relationship between perceived social support and maladaptive emotional Schemas with social anxiety in students.

● The results indicated a significant correlation of perceived social support and emotional scheme with social anxiety.

● There was a significant negative relationship between perceived social support and social anxiety.

● Students with higher perceived social support scores experienced lower social anxiety.

● The level of social anxiety increased by increasing the inefficient emotional scheme in students.

● The students with early maladaptive Schemas experienced higher social anxiety.

Plain Language Summary

The current study aimed at determining the correlation of perceived social support and maladaptive emotional Schemas with social anxiety in students. Students are a group of people in the society that experience anxiety. Students with higher anxiety exert its symptoms throughout their education, which ultimately affects their academic performance. Social anxiety has a negative effect on all important aspects of individual's life such as work and education, as well as social, familial, and emotional communications with others.

Two of the most important cases affecting social anxiety are social support and schemas. The purpose of perceived social support is to perceive accessibility and the adequacy/incompetence of various types of support, and in fact perceived social support is referred to a mental feeling of belonging, being accepted and loved, and affection. Individuals with low perceived social support feel the personal incompetence, anxiety, and social rejection. Emotional Schemas are defined as a set of organized principles or the content of the individual's thought tied to emotions, purposes, memories, and behavioral desires. When emotional Schemas are activated, they have a significant effect on how to interpret and explain life events and react to such events. The results of the study indicated that students with higher perceived social support experienced lower social anxiety. Maladaptive emotional Schemas can be associated with students' social anxiety.

Introduction

Human is a social creature and communicates with his other fellows in the society and has a social life. For this purpose, the person has to enter the collective situations without fear of criticism, rejection or evaluation of other people, and consider himself as a worthwhile human [1]. Social anxiety disorder is a visible and persistent fear of social situations in which there is a possibility of bafflement for a person [2]. Social anxiety is a common mental disorder that its prevalence is reported 3-13% during the lifetime [3].

According to psychologists, students are a group of people in the society that experience anxiety. In fact, the particular problems and crises of the students can increase the anxiety. Students with high anxiety exert its symptoms throughout their education, which ulti-

mately affects their academic performance [4]. Social phobia has a negative impact on all important aspects of individual's life such as work and education, as well as social, familial, and emotional communications with others [5]. The experience of anxiety during the educational period creates problems in the next stages of student's life, which may remain a negative impact on their daily and occupational performance, in addition to personal distresses [6].

According to psychologists, 85% of students with social anxiety have the disorder in their academic and professional performance. An important and problematic point for individuals with high social anxiety is that he/she avoids scary situations, and even sometimes these individuals are unable to talk to others, especially in the classroom, and experience high anxiety [1].

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The concept of perceived social support looks at the support in terms of the perspective of an individual's cognitive assessment of the environment and his/ her relationships with the others. Social support theorists acknowledge that all the interpersonal relationships are not considered social support. In other words, relationships are not a source of social support, unless the individual perceives them as an available or appropriate source to meet his needs [7]. There are some pieces of evidence that the perception of support is more important that the mere support.

Perceived social support is also focused on the cognitive assessment of the individual from his/ her environment and his/ her confidence level in the fact that help and support are available [8]. The purpose of perceived social support is the perception of accessibility and the adequacy/ incompetence of various types of support, and in fact perceived social support is referred to a mental feeling of belonging, being accepted and loved, and affection [9]. Individuals with low perceived social support feel the personal incompetence, anxiety, and social rejection [10]. In addition to social support, emotional Schemas also play an effective role in forming social anxiety [11].

Emotional Schemas are defined as a set of organized principles or the content of the individual's thought tied to emotions, purposes, memories, and behavioral desires. When emotional Schemas are activated, they have a significant effect on how to interpret and explain life events and react to such events [12]. Maladaptive emotional Schemas in individuals lead to the experience of negative events in life, and the presence of such events in individual's life causes to feel excessive psychological stress and dissatisfaction with life. The people with extreme maladaptive Schemas and disability to express excitement/ emotion are more likely to be affected by psychological stress such as anxiety and depression in the life [13].

Emotional Schemas, like other memory Schemas, are driven based on similar abundant information and or repetitive experiences from the individual's past. The components of the emotional scheme are self-blaming, other blaming, non-control, acceptance, reprogramming, re-focus, underestimating the importance of somebody or something, re-evaluation, and disaster making [14]. The findings of Emami indicated that not only social anxiety was affected by bad-functioning in maladaptive schemas, but also the symptoms of this disorder were aggravated by emotion dysregulation; therefore, the negative effects of defective cognition on social anxiety were increased through defective performance of emotional regulation and aggravated the symptoms of social anxiety [15].

Mashhadi et al. found the relationship between perceived social support and social anxiety [16]. Universities are centers that attract a significant number of the world's population annually, and admission to the university and adaptation to the new situations make problems for the lives of a large number of newcomer students, and they encounter challenges and pressures such as the feeling of roving, loneliness, lack of social support, and many psychological damages and illnesses, and the like [17]. On the other hand, reviewing the research background highlights the importance of the social anxiety variable. Therefore, the current study aimed at determining the correlation of social support and emotional Schemas with social anxiety of students.

Materials and Methods

The current correlational analytic study was conducted on all undergraduate students of the Islamic Azad University, Rasht Branch, studying in the academic year 2015-2016 as the statistical population that were totally 3986 students. In the current study, 351 students with social anxiety were selected based on the diagnosis of the Student's Academic Counselor of the university (by interviewing the students) using the convenient sampling method and the Morgan table. Data were collected using a field method and a questionnaire. The inclusion criteria for the study were studying at the undergraduate level, having social anxiety disorder according to the specialist diagnosis, willingness to participate in study, and the absence of other disorders. The freshmen students were not included due to the necessity of the presence of symptoms of social anxiety disorder for six months (according to the diagnostic guidance criteria) and lack of mental history.

After obtaining permission from the Islamic Azad University, Rasht Branch (IR.IAU.RASHT.REC.1395.74) the questionnaires were distributed among the participants. Students with the highest social anxiety scores were selected and given other questionnaires in order to examine the relationship between variables after the diagnostic interview by a psychologist; the Jerabek social anxiety questionnaire was completed by students in case of obtaining a high score and the confirmation of the social anxiety diagnosis. Therefore, the subjects signed written informed consent and voluntarily participated in the study; ethical considerations were observed in the study. The participants were assured

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about the confidentiality of their information and the questionnaires were anonymous. They were asked in case of ambiguities of questions. Answering the questionnaires' items took about 15 minutes. The tool used in this research was the Jerabek social anxiety questionnaire, the Zimet social support scale, and the Leahy emotional Schemas scale.

The social anxiety questionnaire was developed by Lina Jerabek (1996) with 25 items, which is scored based on a five-option Likert scale range from almost never to almost always. The higher score indicates the higher social anxiety. The findings of Eslemi et al. in Iran showed that the reliability of this questionnaire was 0.76 using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The validity of this questionnaire was also confirmed by factor analysis method [18]. In the current study, the reliability of the questionnaire was 0.93 using Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

The perceived social support scale was developed by Zimet et al. (1988). This scale has 12 items in three subscales and is scored based on a Likert scale range from totally agree to totally disagree. The total score range 12 to 60; higher scores indicate a high perception of social support. The Internal Consistency (IC) of this scale was 0.90 by a study in Iran through Cronbach's alpha coefficient [19]. Also, in the current study, the reliability of the questionnaire was calculated 0.87 using Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

The scale of emotional Schemas is developed by Leahy. In this scale, individuals express their views about 50 phrases that examine 14 Schemas that are scored based

on a Likert scale ranging from totally agree to totally disagree. Leahy reported the IC of this scale 0.81 using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient [17]. In Iran, Khanzadeh et al. examined the factor structure and psychometric features of this questionnaire and developed a 37-item scale, which is scored based on Likert scale. The reliability of this scale was reported 0.78 using a test-retest within two weeks for the whole scale and its IC was reported 0.81 using Cronbach's alpha. Also, the validity of this questionnaire was confirmed by the same validity method simultaneously and using related scales [20]. In the current study, the reliability of this questionnaire was 0.72 using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The data were analyzed with SPSS software version 18, and the descriptive statistics including demographic characteristics of subjects, mean and standard deviation, and Pearson correlation coefficient method.

Results

Totally, 351 subjects with the mean age of 22.72±4.80 years participated in the current study; most of which (80.06%) were single and the rest were married (19.4%). In Table 1, the mean of each variable of social anxiety, perceived social support, and emotional scheme are shown. Also, before the implementation of statistical tests, its default was examined in order to use the parametric tests. The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed that the default of the normal distribution of data was about the variables of the study. Therefore, the research hypotheses were tested after the confirmation of the default that the data distribution was normal.

Table 1. Descriptive indices of research variables

Variable	Mean±SD	Z	Sig.*
Social anxiety	68.01±13.12	1.12	0.12
Social support	43.07±8.70	0.51	0.62
Emotional Schema	104.23±12.99	1.01	0.15

* Kolmogrove Smirnov

Table 2. Pearson correlation coefficient matrix

Variable	Social Anxiety	Social Support	Emotional Schema
Social anxiety	1	-	-
Social support	-0.30*	1	-
Emotional Schema	-0.44*	-0.22*	1

*P=0.01

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Table 2 indicated a significant correlation of perceived social support and emotional scheme with social anxiety. In other words, there was a significant and negative correlation between perceived social support and social anxiety with a correlation coefficient of -0.30. It is noteworthy that this finding was significant at 0.01 level. There was also a significant and positive relationship between emotional scheme and social anxiety with a correlation coefficient of 0.44. The current study finding meant that the level of social anxiety increased by increasing the inefficient emotional scheme in students.

Discussion

In the current study, Pearson correlation test was used in order to examine the relationship between perceived social support and social anxiety in students as the first hypothesis. The above statistical results indicated a relationship between perceived social support and social anxiety in the subjects. Therefore, the first hypothesis was confirmed. In other words, subjects with higher scores in perceived social support experienced lower social anxiety. In fact, the relationship between these two variables in the majority of research was significantly negative. Researchers observed a significant mutual relationship between social support and social anxiety in terms of the perceived usefulness of supportive groups [21]. Also, studies indicate a significant and negative relationship between social support and social anxiety in children [22]. The researchers concluded that all subscales of social anxiety had significant relationships with all of the sub-components of the social support [23].

Sivendani found that perceived social support was associated with two self-efficacy components, i e, self-regulation and test taking. In other words, to the extent that subjects perceive more support from their parents, teachers, and classmates, their ability increases in terms of self-regulation and test taking [24]. Beyram et al. observed a significant relationship between perceived social support and the feeling of social-emotional loneliness, in the subjects [25].

A study indicated that individuals with higher social support, compared to the ones not benefitting from this advantage, have better mental health and improve faster to solve their mental problems. In other words, social welfare is in fact social participation and social solidarity; it is clear that increasing social participation followed by receiving the support, and being supported by others improves the presence of an individual in a collective environment, and as a result, his/ her social stress and anxiety is naturally reduced in social activities

and situations by increasing the attendance of the individual at the community [26]. Therefore, if an individual has social support, his/ her social anxiety is greatly reduced, since this support acts as a protective shield for her/ him. On the other hand, the lack of support and secure relationships that arise in the light of social support of others can reduce the positive self-image of the individual, and as a result, cause the context to occur in the social anxiety.

Results of the statistical analyses indicated a significant and positive relationship between the mentioned variables and hypothesis confirmation in the examination of the relationship between maladaptive emotional Schemas and social anxiety of students, as the second hypothesis of the study. Inefficient emotional Schemas lead to an increase in the social anxiety of students and in fact, these two variables had a positive and significant interrelationship. The students with early maladaptive Schemas experienced higher social anxiety.

Tashkeh et al. observed a positive and significant relationship between inefficient emotional Schemas and social anxiety in male and female students, which was consistent with the current study results [11]. However, it was observed in the study that the maladaptive emotional Schemas have a significant and negative correlation with anxiety [27], Which is not consistent with results of current study. It should be mentioned that to explain the second hypothesis, emotional Schemas can act as another facilitating variable in social anxiety, since based on the concept of the Leahy emotional processing, emotional disorders often result from evaluating and interpreting an individual by his/ her feelings and strategies used to cope with these emotions. Also, the inefficient emotional scheme causes an individual to misunderstand his/ her emotions and or interpret them negatively, and that is why the rate of emotional distresses such as depression and anxiety is higher in individuals with inefficient emotional Schemas [28].

Since individuals always interpret their emotions negatively, their level of avoidance is also increased by the behaviors that activate these Schemas. For example, individuals avoid attending social situations since they cannot cope with the emotions and perceive tensions in a proper manner. In case many of these emotions are normal and natural and if these inefficient Schemas are modified or adjusted, the vulnerability of the individual is also reduced; the level of acceptance of emotions increases even undesirably, and despite the experience of unpleasant emotions, an individual can participate in social situations and have interpersonal activities and

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constructive communications, and if he/ she performs this action successfully, he/ she experiences the desired emotions and constructive behaviors are also strengthened in order to participate in social situations more comfortably and confidently in future.

The impossibility of post-study follow-up due to graduation of the subjects was among the current study limitations. After the study, therapeutic measures were taken. It was not possible to study the subjects in terms of the gender due to the limited number of samples. Therefore, the design of follow-up courses and the comparison of the study variables between male and female subjects are recommended in future studies. Also, due to the importance of perceived social support on the various psychological and social aspects of individual`s lives, it is suggested that future studies should examine such categories of variables that can play a mediating role in the context of perceived social support with different psychosocial dimensions of individuals.

It is also suggested to hold courses in group-educational manner at university level by the university counseling center for students with anxiety problems such as social anxiety, and take the constructive measures to promote their psychological/ mental well-being/ health by training the skills to acquire social support and emotional Schemas correction. It can be said that according to the results of the current study, receiving support from others, particularly family members or close friends, increases the sense of being valuable and promotes self-efficacy and self-confidence in the individual.

Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines

The study was approved in the Ethics Committee of Rasht Branch, Islamic Azad University (Ethical code: IR.IAU.RASHT.REC.1395.74).

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Authors contributions

Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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