

EFFECT OF SHYNESS, SOCIAL ANXIETY ON ACADEMIC HELP SEEKING BEHAVIOR AMONG UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Academic help seeking behavior is viewed as an essential part of academia to excel in one's field. The present study is conducted to investigate the effect of Shyness, Social Anxiety on Academic Help Seeking Behavior among university students. For research, sample of (n=102) females and (n=103) male students were collected from different universities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi. 20-Item Shyness Scale (Cheek & Melichor, 1985), Liebowitz Social Anxiety (Liebowitz, 1987) and Academic Help Seeking Scale (Fittler, 2016) were used to measure shyness, social anxiety and academic help seeking behavior. Some demographic variables such as age and gender were also explored. Results showed that shyness and anxiety are positively correlated whereas they are negatively correlated with academic help seeking behavior. It was also found that female university students are more anxious, shy and are less engaged in academic help seeking behavior than male university students. There were no significant differences between students above and below 21 years and students of age below 21 years. Limitations and Implications of the study were also discussed in research.

INTRODUCTION

In any academic program, the learner himself/herself is the main component. The academic world includes many physical elements such as learners, teaching faculty, administrative machinery, curriculum builders, and even community around the academic institutions. But some emotional factors of the learner's personality such as shyness, lack of confidence, introvert habits, or lack of concentration can affect the learner

and his/her behavior. So, a learner's behavior can affect his/her achievements, potentials, and attainment of objectives of learning. (Stobart, 2017)

In a learning process, some students seek academic help from others effortlessly. Students who seriously need academic help from others, but the lack of confidence or shyness restrains them from asking guidance from teachers even in the absence of other

fellows. Some students are unable to speak in the presence of others due to the fear of being prominent, fear of being misjudged, fear of being viewed negatively by others, fear of being perceived as an uninformed one, etc. (Riener & Willingham, 2010)

Academic help-seeking is a vital need for students. Students who are good help seekers take advantage of this ability and become high achievers with good comprehension. During the learning process, students face certain situations that hinder their learning process. Most of the students succeed in solving problems with their efforts without seeking the help of others. But those students who refuse to seek the help of others will face its consequence (Arjaggi & Kusumaningsih, 2016).

1.1 Research Objective

The current paper tends to explore the relationship between shyness and social anxiety and their impact on academic help-seeking behavior among university students. This paper also analyzes the effect of age among university students on shyness, social anxiety, and academic help-seeking behavior.

1.2 Research Question

The research question of this study is: Is there exist a co-relation between shyness and social anxiety that exhibits an impact on academic help-seeking behavior?

1.3 Delimitation of Study

This study was delimited as sample was taken from the universities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi only and size of the sample can be increased.

Literature Review

Shyness and social anxiety are emotional states that arise when individuals encounter social situations, often resulting in discomfort and avoidance behaviors. Research has shown that these traits can have long-term consequences on children's social development and later academic and professional outcomes (Rubin,

Coplan, Bowker, & Menzer, 2011).

In academic settings, shy children face challenges not only in adapting to the school environment but also in forming positive relationships with teachers and peers (Rydell, Bohlin, & Thorell, 2005; Rudasill & Kaufman, 2009). Students with high shyness and anxiety often feel uncomfortable in social interactions, which negatively affects their academic engagement, classroom participation, and relationship-building (Crozier & Alden, 2001). In India, D'Souza, Urs, and James (2000) found that shy students are more prone to neurotic tendencies, which adversely influence their learning and academic performance.

Social anxiety, also known as social phobia, is characterized by a fear of being evaluated in social situations (Sue et al., 2016). According to the cognitive model of social anxiety, individuals perceive themselves from the perspective of others, heightening self-consciousness (Rapee & Heimberg, 1997). Approximately 3–5% of youth experience social anxiety (Wittchen, Stein, & Kessler, 2000), often avoiding social situations such as speaking or eating with others (Mash & Wolfe, 2003). Studies indicate that university students frequently experience social anxiety, which can hinder academic performance and peer interaction (Kearney, 2005; Nelson & Harwood, 2010; Owens, Stevenson, & Norgate, 2012).

Senior secondary education is a critical stage for student development, where adaptive learning and social integration significantly impact academic achievement and future opportunities (Deb et al., 2015; Farmer et al., 2009; Ryan, 2011). University students must navigate situations involving social evaluation, which requires positive social skills. High social anxiety can result in poor social competence, weak interpersonal connections, and impaired learning (Bernstein et al., 2007). Gender differences also play a role in academic help-seeking behavior. Some studies report that males are more likely to seek academic help due to social confidence, while

females may avoid seeking help due to shyness and social anxiety (Wimer, 2009; Liu et al., 2012). Conversely, other research indicates that males may delay seeking help because of ego concerns, while females are more proactive in requesting assistance (Benenson & Koulmazarian, 2008).

Academic help-seeking can be formal (e.g., asking instructors or academic services) or informal (e.g., consulting peers or friends) and is influenced by students' social skills, self-perception, and confidence (Karabenick & Knapp, 1988; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997). Students often avoid seeking help due to fear of appearing incompetent, damaging their social image, or displaying weaknesses in front of peers or teachers (Fisher & Nadler, 1983; Butler & Neuman, 1995).

Shyness and social anxiety hinder students from developing effective communication and academic help-seeking behaviors, which are essential for learning and personal development. University students lacking these skills may experience lasting negative effects on their professional and social lives. Additionally, social anxiety can affect performance in assessments due to fear of evaluation, resulting in lower academic engagement and achievement (Rosenthal et al., 2000; Evans, 2001).

In conclusion, literature suggests a strong association between shyness, social anxiety, and academic help-seeking behavior. These traits significantly impact university students' learning processes, classroom participation, and overall academic performance. While other factors such as gender, ego, self-esteem, and social skills also play a role, social anxiety and shyness remain primary barriers to effective academic help-seeking. Understanding and addressing these issues is crucial for fostering students' academic success and social competence.

Research Methodology

1.4 Research Design

Correlational research design was followed in this research in which qualitative and

quantitative methods were followed. Data was collected numerically, then it is presented in statistical form after it is analyzed and interpreted.

1.5 Sample and Sampling Techniques

Sample of the study was collected from different universities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi. It consists of 205 students in which (n=103) males and (n=102) females are included. Data was collected in google form by convenient sampling technique.

1.6 Instrumentation

As research consist of three variables so for measuring them 3 valid and reliable instruments were used. For shyness 20-item shyness scale was used developed by (Cheek & Melichor, 1985), it consists of 20 items on which respondents has to rate their feeling on 5 point Likert type scale ranging from (strongly agree) to (strongly disagree). The reliability is 0.94 (M = 51.8; SD = 13.6) and it is 0.96 correlated with original Cheek and Buss 9 item shyness scale.

Liebowitz social anxiety scale developed by (liebowtiz, 1987) was used for measuring social anxiety. 24 items are present in this scale which are distributed into two subscales 13 items are for measuring performance anxiety and 12 items are of social situation. The respondent has to mark their feeling on Likert scale ranges from 0-3 on fear experience during the situation and same for the avoidance of situation. Reliability of scale is established which is 0.94.

For Academic help seeking behavior scale developed by (Fittrrer,2016) is used. The scale consists of 12 items. The first two item measure instrumental help seeking, 3,4 measure executive help seeking, 5,6,7 measure help seeking threat, 8,9,10 measure help seeking avoidance, and 11,12 measure formal versus informal help seeking. It is 5 points Likert type scale on which students have to response from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The reliability of the scale is 0.63.

1.7 Data Collection

As research was conducted in pandemic COVID-19 situation. So data was gathered by the sharing google form on different social media platform and university students were asked to fill the questionnaire. Inform consent was taken to insure that participants are voluntarily taking part in research. By keeping the ethical consideration under view information of the participants were kept confidential. After collection data was analyzed and scoring was done.

3.Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed by using SPSS version 20. For parametric data, an independent sample t-test was used to assess the mean difference between two groups. To examine the statistic association between two groups. To analysis data psychometric properties, calculated frequency of demographic variable, alpha reliability of each scales, and inter correlation was used.

Table 4.1
Descriptive statistics of Demographic variables of the study (N=205)

Variables	Frequency (<i>f</i>)	%
Gender		
Male	102	49.8
Female	103	50.2
Age		
17-23	127	62
24-30	78	38



Table no 4.1 shows the sample of (N=205) of students (49.8% males, 50.2% females). The sample consisted of age range 17-30 male students and female students. Along with

these students 62% belonged to 17-23 age group, 38% belonged 24-30 age group.

Table 4.2
Inter-correlations among study variables (N=205)

Variables	1	2	3	4
1 Shyness	—	0.56**	0.48**	-0.18**
2 Social Anxiety Fear	—	—	0.73**	-0.15*

3 Social Anxiety Avoidance	—	—	—	-0.20**
4 Academic Help Seeking	—	—	—	—

Note: * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ (two tailed)

Table no 4.2 shows Inter-correlations among study variables. It is evident from the result shows that there is a significant positive correlation of shyness with social anxiety fear ($r=0.56$) and social anxiety avoidance ($r=0.48$). and shyness have significantly negative co-relation with academic help seeking ($r=-0.18$). There is significant difference between social anxiety fear and avoidance ($r= 0.73$) and social anxiety fear have significant negative co-relation with academic help seeking behavior ($r= -0.15$). Social anxiety avoidance also has significant negative relation with academic help seeking behavior (-0.20).

Table 4.3
Regression Analysis Predicting Academic Help Seeking from Shyness among University Students (N=205)

	R ²	ADJUSTED R ²	B	B	t	P
Constant			20.59		18.38	.000
Shyness	0.01	0.00	0.03	-1.11	1.68	0.09



Table no 4.3 shows that regression indicates that the β coefficient ($\beta=-1.11$) is negative when predicting the relationship between shyness and Academic Help Seeking, this analysis predicts that with increase in shyness being IV, there comes a decrease in Academic Help Seeking Behavior.

Table 4.4
Regression analysis predicting Academic Help Seeking from Social Anxiety Fear among University Students (N=205)

	R ²	ADJUSTED R ²	B	B	t	p
Constant			19.33		63.19	.000
Social Anxiety Fear	0.025	0.02	0.02	-0.01	2.29	0.02

Table no 4.4 indicates that the β coefficient ($\beta=-0.01$) is negative when calculating the relationship between Social Anxiety for fear and Academic Help Seeking, this analysis predicts that with increase in

social anxiety being fear IV, there comes a decrease in Academic Help Seeking Behavior.

Table 4.5


Regression analysis predicting Dependent variable AHS Independent is SAA (N=205)

	R ²	ADJUSTED R ²	B	β	t	p
Constant			19.68		56.28	.000
Social Anxiety Avoidance	0.04	0.03	0.03	-0.20	3.03	.000

The above 4.5 table of regression indicates that the β coefficient (β=-0.20) is negative when calculating the relationship between Social Anxiety avoidance and Academic Help Seeking, this analysis predicts that with increase in social anxiety avoidance being IV, there comes a decrease in Academic Help Seeking Behavior.

Table 4.6

Mean, Standard Deviations and t-Values along Gender on shyness, social anxiety and academic help seeking. (N=205)



Variables	Males (n=102)		Females (n=103)		t(203)	p	95% of CI		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			LL	UL	
Shyness	59.06	09.52	63.02	07.68	3.26	.00	6.35	1.56	0.45
Social Anxiety Fear	24.45	15.59	29.03	16.60	2.04	.04	9.02	0.15	0.28
Social Anxiety Avoidance	25.71	14.13	33.69	14.77	3.95	.00	11.9	4.00	0.55
Academic Help Seeking									

19.01 01.97 18.45 02.55 1.78 .07 1.19 0.06 0.24

Note: df=201 ; LL = Lower Limit; UL = Upper Limit; CI = Confidence Interval

Table 4.6 shows that there is significance difference on shyness, social anxiety fear, and social anxiety avoidances. The mean column of the table indicates that female students scored higher on shyness (M=63.02, SD=07.68) and social anxiety (M=29.03, SD=16.60) whereas male students scored high in academic help seeking behavior (M=19.01, SD=01.97). Hence, study hypotheses are approved.

Table 4.7

variables	Age 17-23 (n=125)		Age 24-30 (n=78)		t (203)		95% of CI		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD	t	p	LL	UL	
	Shyness	61.41	09.16	60.87	08.30	0.21	0.84	2.25	
Social Anxiety Fear	26.80	15.96	26.67	15.96	0.05	0.57	4.49	4.73	0.00
Social Anxiety Avoidance	28.93	14.74	31.01	15.33	0.96	0.56	6.32	2.17	0.13
Academic Help Seeking	18.55	02.06	18.85	02.42	0.90	0.35	0.35	0.94	0.13

Mean, Standard Deviations and t-Values along Age on shyness, social anxiety and academic help seeking. (N=205)

Note: df=203 ; LL = Lower Limit; UL = Upper Limit; CI = Confidence Interval

Table 4.7 indicates that there is a non-significance difference between students above 23 years and students below 23 years on shyness, social anxiety fear, social anxiety avoidance, and academic help seeking.

Discussion

The focus of present research was to determine the effect of shyness, social anxiety and academic help seeking among university students. Research was

carried out to find the effect of these variables among demographic variables like age, gender and education level. The sample consisted of 205 students; 103 male students and 102 female

students. 20-Item Shyness Scale (Cheek & Melichor, 1985), Liebowitz' Social Anxiety Scale (Liebowitz, 1987), and Academic Help Seeking Scale (Fitttrrer, 2016) are used for the study. The reliability of all the research instruments is found to be satisfactory which shows that the scales were consistent.

According to first hypothesis shyness and social anxiety have positive relation where as both variables have negative co-relation with academic help seeking. The results of the present study proved the notion that shyness and social anxiety are positively co-related with one another and negatively co-related with academic help seeking behavior. So, the students who have more social anxiety are less likely to take academic help. The study of Brook and Willoughby (2015) also supports the present research result as they have found in their study the negative relation between social anxiety and academic achievement among university students. Their study indicates that for the success in academic life students should have proper social relations. But if they fail to build the relation because of social anxiety their academic achievement will be directly hurt by it. As shyness has also negative impact on academic performance that if student cannot feel comfortable due to shy personality it will affect his academic life negatively (Hughes and Coplan, 2010).

Second hypothesis states that female students have more shyness and social anxiety than males. The results of the present study also proved this notion that shyness and social anxiety are more in female students as compared to male students. One such study has been done by (Cox et al., 2005) who found the occurrence of social anxiety and shyness in common population and reported that over the last thirty years, social anxiety has been increased to 12% while they concluded that females have more social anxiety and shyness than males.

According to the third hypothesis which states Help seeking behavior is less in female university students than male university students. The present research results verified that the number of females is less in asking academic help due to their shyness and social anxiety. The study of D.J. Wimer (2009) maintain the similar conception that help seeking behavior is more found in males

than females as females hesitate more and become more socially anxious because of their shyness and there exists a difference between university students above 21 years and below 21 years in relation to shyness, social anxiety and academic help seeking behavior. The results of the present study indicate that there exists slight difference in the students above 21 years and students below 21 years in relation to shyness as well as social anxiety and the same case is with academic help seeking attitude. The same approach was studied by Yap et al. (2013) who argued that embarrassment or shyness was the most frequently occurring barrier to seeking help among people aged 15-25 years which indicates that there certainly exists some relationship between age and shyness, anxiety and help seeking behavior. So, shy individuals seek less help as compare to students who are not shy. Shyness become obstacle in completing the task in academics because the they avoid to take help from others (Horsch, 2006).

Limitations

- Sample was taken from the universities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi; researcher can take the sample from diverse universities of Pakistan to increase the generalizability.
- Size of sample can be increased to be a true representative of population.
- Random sampling is the most reliable and objective sampling technique but in present research it was not possible.
- Manual data was more convenient as internet is not available all the time to everyone.

Implications

It is necessary to arrange awareness programs or workshop for university students where they are taught how to cope with the social anxiety problems or shyness which become hurdle in their academic life. Other than this, Universities should have proper educational psychologist or counsellor in every department so growth groups interactive sessions for the students should be arranged. There should also be proper monitoring of the students on regular basis. It is advised that seminars, workshops and training sessions for the faculty members should be arranged so that they

would get awareness of the psychological issues of the students.

Conclusion

The present study revealed that shyness and social anxiety is positively correlated with each other and negatively co-related with academic help seeking. It is concluded that students who are shy or have tendency of social anxiety are less likely to seek academic help. It was also concluded that female university students are shy and anxious than male university students because of that female university students are less likely to engage in seeking help as compared to male university students. Maybe it is because of the cultural barriers that females face in our society. Although, there is much improvement in their confidence as compare to past, still they are not steadfast in their personality grooming specially when they are in situation where males are also present with them. Their traditional feminine reluctances become a hindrance in their academic life in seeking help which they sometimes improve in their practical life. While there is some difference is to be seen on age below 21 and above 21. It has been observed that the students above and below 21 i.e., those who fall in the age range of 17 to 30, showed slight difference in relation to shyness as well as social anxiety and the same case is with academic help seeking attitude.

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