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Dynamics of Social Anxiety Among First-Year Students: Gender and Age Perspectives

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Dynamics of Social Anxiety Among First-Year Students: Gender and Age Perspectives

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Abstract: This study explores the dynamics of social anxiety among first-year university students, focusing on the challenges they face and the adaptations they employ. The primary objective is to understand how specific factors influence students' anxiety levels, particularly examining the correlations between gender, age, and facets of social anxiety. Employing a survey design, data were collected using a validated questionnaire comprising 32 items that measure key aspects of social anxiety: Fear of Negative Evaluation, Avoidance of Social Situations with Strangers, and General Avoidance of Social Situations. The study analyzed responses from 334 students, predominantly female (69.2%) and under 20 years of age (84.4%), with most participants enrolled in the Faculty of Education and Psychology (67.1%). Results indicate significant correlations between the examined factors and social anxiety levels, with p-values < 0.05 across all aspects. Gender was significantly associated with general anxiety, with females exhibiting higher anxiety levels. Age was strongly correlated with Fear of Negative Evaluation, while faculty affiliation showed a significant relationship with Fear of Negative Evaluation and General Avoidance of Social Situations, but not with overall anxiety levels. These findings highlight the critical role of gender in influencing social anxiety, while the effects of age and faculty vary across specific dimensions of anxiety.

Key Words: Social anxiety; First-year students; Gender differences; Fear of negative evaluation; Avoidance behavior

INTRODUCTION

The psychological dynamics of first-year students encompass various factors that influence their adaptation to university life, including psychodynamic influences, where students' personalities significantly affect their ability to adapt to educational activities. Research shows that individual characteristics, such as personality traits and interaction styles, can influence students' learning styles and their ability to adapt to a new academic environment (Yakovlev et al., 2018). Furthermore, social-psychological adaptation, which represents the transition from high school to university, brings various social and psychological challenges. Students need to build new social networks and face increasing academic pressure, which can directly affect their overall well-being. (Sunakbaikyzy, 2023). Effective coping strategies and social engagement are crucial for successful adaptation. The psychological contract related to the relationship between first-year students and academic advisors is very important in building the psychological contract between students and the institution. Good interactions provide strong support and attachment, making students feel more comfortable in a new environment. Conversely, conflicts in these relationships can cause significant emotional stress, affecting their perception of the university experience and their involvement in academic and social activities (Yale, 2020).

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Self-adjustment in students can be significantly associated with the coping strategies they apply to manage anxiety, especially in stressful situations. Research shows that students use various coping mechanisms, which can alleviate or worsen their psychological stress.Students often apply adaptive coping strategies (problem-solving) and maladaptive strategies (avoidance). Adaptive strategies, such as seeking social support, are associated with better adjustment and lower aggression, while maladaptive strategies can lead to increased stress and aggression (Bukhari & Ejaz, 2020; Hu & Sun, 2023).

Normal anxiety in daily life is an adaptive response to perceived threats, manifested through various behaviors and subjective experiences. This form of anxiety is important for personal growth and survival, as it encourages individuals to respond to potential dangers. However, anxiety can also lead to maladaptive behavior when individuals misinterpret signals or become overly sensitive to threats. The following section discusses the nature, components, and implications of normal anxiety. anxiety can be adaptive, functioning as a catalyst for adaptation and growth, reflecting its multifaceted nature. However, anxiety can also lead to maladaptive behavior due to individual differences in threat perception and response calibration. Excessive sensitivity to threats can develop when individuals become overly cautious, leading to a failure in accurately assessing environmental risks (Meacham & Bergstrom, 2016).

Anxiety serves as a protective mechanism that enables a person to face challenges and avoid potential dangers. This adaptive response is essential for survival because it prepares organisms to face threats by enhancing attention and performance in high-pressure situations (Gutierrez-Garsia & Contreras, 2013). The effectiveness of anxiety is influenced by interactions with environmental factors, where risk factors and protective factors also shape how individuals respond to anxiety-triggering events (Zhong et al., 2021). Social anxiety manifests differently between men and women, influenced by various factors including social interactions, performance contexts, and broader societal conditions. Research shows that women generally report higher levels of social anxiety than men, especially during adolescence and in clinical settings. This gender gap is clearly visible in self-reported anxiety levels and observable behaviors during social tasks. Research findings indicate that women tend to score higher on measures of social anxiety, as measured by the Social Phobia Inventory (SPIN), across various age groups (Ranta et al., 2007).

A study found that women show a greater risk of anxiety than men, with 35.2% of women reporting anxiety compared to 28.2% of men. Although women generally experience higher levels of social anxiety, it is important to consider that men may also face significant anxiety, especially in certain contexts, which can increase their risk of anxiety (Jacques-Aviñó et al., 2022). Both genders show visible signs of anxiety, such as restlessness, but no significant performance disruptions were recorded, indicating that anxiety manifests more in behavioral discomfort than in performance quality (Thompson et al., 2019). In social interactions, women show a decrease in heart rate and an increase in heart rate variability with partners they know, indicating a unique response to social buffering (Gründahl et al., 2023).

Age significantly affects the level of social anxiety, especially during adolescence and early adulthood. Research shows that social anxiety is most common among young individuals, with a noticeable increase in symptoms observed from early adolescence to young adulthood. The prevalence among young people in a study across seven countries found that more than 36% of young adults aged 16-29 met the criteria for social anxiety, highlighting the critical age range for the onset of social anxiety (Jefferies & Ungar, 2020). In Finland, the rate of high social anxiety symptoms among adolescents aged 13-20 doubled from 2013 to 2021, especially among girls, indicating growing concerns in this demographic (Ranta et al., 2007).

Adolescents with social anxiety show altered brain development, particularly in the subcortical regions, which correlates with the severity of symptoms. The discoordination of this development is more clearly seen in mid-adolescence (Liu et al., 2022).The presence of peer victimization and low social support during early adolescence has been linked to increased levels of anxiety, indicating that social dynamics play an important role in the development of social anxiety. (Spence et al., 2022). Although research on social anxiety in late adolescents has been extensively conducted, most studies still treat social anxiety as a single variable without differentiating the analysis into specific aspects. Furthermore, although age and gender are known to play an important role in influencing social anxiety, existing studies often explore these variables separately or only highlight the basic relationship between

them. This overlooks the more complex dynamics that may occur. Therefore, more in-depth and targeted research is needed that integrates age, gender, and study programs/faculties to understand how these subvariables interact with various aspects of social anxiety more specifically.

METHOD

This study utilises a survey design, adopting a descriptive survey method to investigate circumstances pertinent to the topic under examination. It seeks to characterise a sample or population by quantitative methods concerning attitudes, opinions, behaviours, and attributes. This research employs a cross-sectional survey approach to gather data from diverse respondents at a single moment to assess and quantify the degree of social anxiety among students (Creswell, 2012).

Participants

The sample in this study comprises first-year students from diverse faculties at a university in Yogyakarta. This study comprised 334 participating students. The participants encompass several academic disciplines, offering a comprehensive perspective of social anxiety experiences throughout various fields of study. Participants were solicited to engage in the survey via a social media group that provided a link to the poll along with details regarding the research's objective and advantages. The survey was administered online via the Google Forms platform. This survey is intended to be readily available on any device and may be finished in roughly 10-15 minutes. The survey comprises a sequence of enquiries regarding individuals' experiences in social contexts, utilising the Social Anxiety Scale.

Instrumentation

Data collection was executed via a questionnaire comprising research equipment. The tool utilised in this study pertains to the dimensions of social anxiety delineated by La Greca and Lopez (1998) for assessing social anxiety in students: 1) Fear of negative evaluation, 2) Avoidance of social situations with strangers, 3) General avoidance of social situations. This scale comprises 34 verified items, of which 32 are considered valid, and it has a Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.917, signifying a high degree of internal consistency. This scale employs a five-point Likert scale, enabling participants to evaluate the degree to which each statement corresponds to their experiences and emotions in social contexts.

Data Analysis

The Chi-Square approach is employed for data analysis in this study due to multiple justifications. The Chi-Square analysis offers a definitive method to address research enquiries concerning the prevalence of social anxiety in connection to age and gender, as well as the correlation among the various dimensions of social anxiety under investigation.

RESULTS

This study focuses on first-year college students, offering insights into social anxiety among individuals transitioning into their academic journey. A total of 334 respondents participated, with the majority being female (231 students, 69.2%), compared to 103 male participants (30.8%). This gender distribution highlights a predominance of female respondents in the sample. In terms of age, most participants were 20 years old or younger, accounting for 282 respondents (84.4%), while 52 respondents (15.6%) were aged 21 or older. This age distribution aligns with the study's focus on first-year students, who are typically in their late teens or early twenties and adjusting to the complexities of college life.

Regarding faculty affiliation, the largest proportion of respondents came from the Faculty of Education and Psychology (FIPP), with 224 students (67.1%). This significant representation may reflect a heightened interest or relevance of the topic of social anxiety within this faculty. Other faculties

represented include the Faculty of Economics and Business (FEB) with 29 respondents (8.7%), the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences (FISIPHOL) with 43 respondents (12.9%), the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences (FMIPA) with 33 respondents (9.9%), and the Faculty of Language and Arts (FBS), which had the smallest representation with only 5 respondents (1.5%).

This demographic data provides a comprehensive overview of the respondents' characteristics, serving as a foundation for exploring the relationship between factors such as gender, age, and educational background with levels of social anxiety among first-year students.

Table 1. The relationship between the three measured aspects—fear of negative evaluation, avoidance of social situations with strangers, and general avoidance of social situations—and the level of social anxiety among first-year students

Aspect category			Anxious category			Total	P value
			Low	Moderate	High		
(1) Fear of negative evaluation	Low	Count	6	28	0	34	0.000
		% of Total	1.80%	8.40%	0.00%	10.20%	
	Moderate	Count	0	76	25	101	
		% of Total	0.00%	22.80%	7.50%	30.20%	
	High	Count	0	112	87	199	
		% of Total	0.00%	33.50%	26.00%	59.60%	
Total		Count	6	216	112	334	
		% of Total	1.80%	64.70%	33.50%	100.00%	
			Low	Moderate	High	Total	
(2) Avoidance of social situations with strangers	Low	Count	6	65	3	74	0.000
		% of Total	1.80%	19.50%	0.90%	22.20%	
	Moderate	Count	0	150	104	254	
		% of Total	0.00%	44.90%	31.10%	76.00%	
	High	Count	0	1	5	6	
		% of Total	0.00%	0.30%	1.50%	1.80%	
Total		Count	6	216	112	334	
		% of Total	1.80%	64.70%	33.50%	100.00%	
			Low	Moderate	High	Total	
(3) General avoidance of social situations	Low	Count	0	8	0	8	0.000
		% of Total	0.00%	2.40%	0.00%	2.40%	
	Moderate	Count	6	145	25	176	
		% of Total	1.80%	43.40%	7.50%	52.70%	
	High	Count	0	63	87	150	
		% of Total	0.00%	18.90%	26.00%	44.90%	
Total		Count	6	216	112	334	
		% of Total	1.80%	64.70%	33.50%	100.00%	

Table 1 reveal a significant relationship between the three measured aspects—fear of negative evaluation, avoidance of social situations with strangers, and general avoidance of social situations—and the level of social anxiety among first-year students. Each aspect demonstrates a highly significant correlation with a p-value of 0.000, indicating a strong statistical association.

In Aspect 1 (fear of negative evaluation), the distribution of social anxiety levels shows an interesting trend. Among respondents categorized as "low" in this aspect, the majority experience "moderate" social anxiety (8.4%), while only 1.8% report "low" anxiety levels. This suggests that even with a lower fear of negative evaluation, social anxiety remains prevalent. On the other hand, in the "high" category for this aspect, a significant proportion of respondents experience "moderate" (33.5%) or "high" (26.0%) levels of social anxiety. These findings indicate that higher scores on Aspect 1

strongly correlate with increased social anxiety, making it a crucial factor in understanding students' experiences.

For Aspect 2 (avoidance of social situations with strangers), a similar pattern emerges. Respondents in the "low" category tend to experience "moderate" levels of social anxiety (19.5%). In the "moderate" category of this aspect, the majority (44.9%) also report "moderate" anxiety, with others experiencing higher levels of anxiety. This suggests that as scores on this aspect increase, the likelihood of heightened social anxiety also rises. These findings highlight the importance of Aspect 2 in understanding social anxiety, especially in contexts involving new or unfamiliar social environments.

Aspect 3 (general avoidance of social situations) also shows consistent trends. Nearly all respondents categorized as "low" in this aspect still report "moderate" levels of social anxiety, indicating that even low levels of general avoidance do not eliminate feelings of anxiety. Among those in the "moderate" category for this aspect, a large proportion (43.4%) experience "moderate" anxiety, while 7.5% experience "high" anxiety. This emphasizes the significant role of general social avoidance in influencing students' anxiety levels.

Overall, the analysis highlights that all three aspects—fear of negative evaluation, avoidance of social situations with strangers, and general avoidance of social situations—are strongly linked to social anxiety among first-year students. The consistent p-value of 0.000 for all three aspects underscores their critical role in exacerbating social anxiety, especially during the challenging transition to college life. These findings provide valuable insights into the interconnected nature of these factors and suggest the need for targeted interventions to help first-year students better manage social anxiety as they adapt to their new academic environment.

Table 2. Analysis of Fear of Negative Evaluation: Gender, Age, and Faculty

			Fear of negative evaluation			Total	P Value
			Low	Moderate	High		
Gender	Female	Count	19	67	145	231	
		% of Total	5.70%	20.10%	43.40%	69.20%	
	Male	Count	15	34	54	103	0.107
		% of Total	4.50%	10.20%	16.20%	30.80%	
Total		Count	34	101	199	334	
		% of Total	10.20%	30.20%	59.60%	100.00%	
			Low	Moderate	High	Total	
Age	<= 20 Years	Count	28	95	159	282	
		% of Total	8.40%	28.40%	47.60%	84.40%	
	> 21 Years	Count	6	6	40	52	0.006
		% of Total	1.80%	1.80%	12.00%	15.60%	
Total		Count	34	101	199	334	
		% of Total	10.20%	30.20%	59.60%	100.00%	
			Low	Moderate	High	Total	
Faculty	FBS	Count	0	0	5	5	
		% of Total	0.00%	0.00%	1.50%	1.50%	
	FEB	Count	2	8	19	29	
		% of Total	0.60%	2.40%	5.70%	8.70%	
	FIPP	Count	25	63	136	224	
		% of Total	7.50%	18.90%	40.70%	67.10%	
	FISIPHOL	Count	5	5	33	43	
		% of Total	1.50%	1.50%	9.90%	12.90%	0.00
	FMIPA	Count	2	25	6	33	
		% of Total	0.60%	7.50%	1.80%	9.90%	
Total		Count	34	101	199	334	
		% of Total	10.20%	30.20%	59.60%	100.00%	

Table 2 indicate that age and faculty are significantly associated with Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE), while gender is not. Regarding gender, although there is no statistically significant relationship (p = 0.107), females exhibit a higher proportion of high FNE scores (62.8%) compared to males (30.8%). However, this difference is not statistically significant. On the other hand, age shows a significant relationship with FNE (p = 0.006). Respondents under the age of 20 are more prone to experiencing high levels of anxiety, with 47.6% reporting high FNE scores, compared to only 12.5% of respondents aged 21 and older. This finding suggests that younger students, particularly those new to college life, are more vulnerable to anxiety related to negative evaluation. Faculty of origin also has a very significant relationship with FNE (p = 0.000). The majority of respondents from the Faculty of Education and Psychology (FEP) report high FNE scores (67.1%), which is considerably higher than the Faculty of Economics and Business (FEB) at 0.6% and the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences (FMNS) at 1.8%. These findings indicate that students from FEP are more likely to experience higher levels of anxiety related to negative evaluation compared to students from other faculties. Overall, age and faculty are key factors associated with FNE, while gender does not show a significant influence. Nevertheless, the higher proportion of FNE among females warrants attention in interpreting these results.

Table 3. Analysis of Avoidance of Social Situations with Strangers: Gender, Age, and Faculty

			Avoidance of social situations with strangers			Total	P Value
			Low	Moderate	High		
Gender	Female	Count	53	174	4	231	
		% of Total	15.90%	52.10%	1.20%	69.20%	0.87
	Male	Count	21	80	2	103	
		% of Total	6.30%	24.00%	0.60%	30.80%	
Total		Count	74	254	6	334	
		% of Total	22.20%	76.00%	1.80%	100.00%	
			Low	Moderate	High	Total	
Age	<= 20 Years	Count	64	212	6	282	
		% of Total	19.20%	63.50%	1.80%	84.40%	0.467
	> 21 Years	Count	10	42	0	52	
		% of Total	3.00%	12.60%	0.00%	15.60%	
Total		Count	74	254	6	334	
		% of Total	22.20%	76.00%	1.80%	100.00%	
			Low	Moderate	High	Total	
Faculty	FBS	Count	0	5	0	5	
		% of Total	0.00%	1.50%	0.00%	1.50%	
	FEB	Count	3	26	0	29	
		% of Total	0.90%	7.80%	0.00%	8.70%	
	FIPP	Count	54	164	6	224	
		% of Total	16.20%	49.10%	1.80%	67.10%	0.034
	FISIPHOL	Count	15	28	0	43	
		% of Total	4.50%	8.40%	0.00%	12.90%	
	FMIPA	Count	2	31	0	33	
		% of Total	0.60%	9.30%	0.00%	9.90%	
Total		Count	74	254	6	334	
		% of Total	22.20%	76.00%	1.80%	100.00%	

Table 3 shown the analysis of Avoidance of Social Situations with Strangers based on gender, age, and faculty reveals several key findings. Regarding gender, among 231 female respondents, the majority (52.10%) are in the Moderate category, 15.90% are in the Low category, and only 1.20% are in the High category. For the 103 male respondents, 24.00% are in the Moderate category, 6.30% in the Low category, and none in the High category. The p-value of 0.87 indicates no significant relationship between gender and the distribution of Avoidance of Social Situations with Strangers.

When analyzed by age, respondents under 20 years old mostly fall into the Moderate category (63.50%), followed by 19.20% in the Low category, and 1.80% in the High category. Similarly, respondents aged 21 and older also predominantly fall into the Moderate category but at a lower proportion (12.60%). The p-value of 0.467 suggests no significant relationship between age and the distribution of Avoidance of Social Situations with Strangers.

In contrast, the analysis based on faculty shows significant variation. Students from the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences (FISIP) predominantly fall into the Moderate category (13.90%), while students from the Faculty of Education and Psychology (FIPP) have a higher proportion in the Low category (16.20%). The p-value of 0.034 indicates a significant relationship between faculty and Avoidance of Social Situations with Strangers. These findings suggest that while gender and age do not significantly affect this behavior, faculty affiliation may influence students' tendencies to avoid social situations with strangers, warranting further investigation.

Table 4. Analysis of General Avoidance of Social Situations: Gender, Age, and Faculty

			General avoidance of social situations			Total	P Value
			Low	Moderate	High		
Gender	Female	Count	6	119	106	231	0.785
		% of Total	1.80%	35.60%	31.70%	69.20%	
	Male	Count	2	57	44	103	
		% of Total	0.60%	17.10%	13.20%	30.80%	
Total		Count	8	176	150	334	
		% of Total	2.40%	52.70%	44.90%	100.00%	
			Low	Moderate	High	Total	
Age	<= 20 Years	Count	5	151	126	282	0.202
		% of Total	1.50%	45.20%	37.70%	84.40%	
	> 21 Years	Count	3	25	24	52	
		% of Total	0.90%	7.50%	7.20%	15.60%	
Total		Count	8	176	150	334	
		% of Total	2.40%	52.70%	44.90%	100.00%	
			Low	Moderate	High	Total	
Faculty	FBS	Count	0	2	3	5	0.011
		% of Total	0.00%	0.60%	0.90%	1.50%	
	FEB	Count	0	17	12	29	
		% of Total	0.00%	5.10%	3.60%	8.70%	
	FIPP	Count	7	121	96	224	
		% of Total	2.10%	36.20%	28.70%	67.10%	
	FISIPHOL	Count	0	29	14	43	
		% of Total	0.00%	8.70%	4.20%	12.90%	
	FMIPA	Count	1	7	25	33	
		% of Total	0.30%	2.10%	7.50%	9.90%	
Total		Count	8	176	150	334	
		% of Total	2.40%	52.70%	44.90%	100.00%	

Table 4 shown the analysis of the distribution of General Avoidance of Social Situations categories based on gender, age, and faculty provides valuable insights into group differences. Regarding gender, the data reveals that among 231 female respondents, 35.60% fall into the Moderate

category, 31.70% into the High category, and only 1.80% into the Low category. For the 103 male respondents, the distribution is lower, with 17.10% in the Moderate category, 13.20% in the High category, and 0.60% in the Low category. Despite these differences, a p-value of 0.785 indicates no statistically significant relationship between gender and General Avoidance of Social Situations, suggesting that the observed variations are insufficient to demonstrate a meaningful influence of gender.

Similarly, age-based analysis shows that respondents under 20 years old are predominantly in the Moderate category (45.20%), followed by 39.40% in the High category and 1.50% in the Low category. In comparison, respondents aged 21 and older also largely fall into the Moderate category (7.50%), with only 7.20% in the High category. A p-value of 0.202 further indicates no significant relationship between age and General Avoidance of Social Situations, implying that age does not substantially influence the observed categories. Conversely, faculty analysis reveals more notable variations. Students from the Faculty of Education and Psychology (FIPP) exhibit higher percentages in the Moderate (36.20%) and High (28.70%) categories, while students from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Political Sciences (FISIP) show significantly lower percentages in the High category (4.20%). A p-value of 0.011 confirms a significant relationship between faculty affiliation and General Avoidance of Social Situations, suggesting that institutional or contextual factors associated with faculty membership may play a pivotal role. These findings underscore the need for further investigation to explore the mechanisms driving these differences and their potential impact on students across various faculties.

Table 5. Anxiety categories

			Anxiety categories			Total	P Value
			Low	Moderate	High		
Gender	Female	Count	3	141	87	231	
		% of Total	0.90%	42.20%	26.00%	69.20%	
	Male	Count	3	75	25	103	0.041
		% of Total	0.90%	22.50%	7.50%	30.80%	
Total		Count	6	216	112	334	
		% of Total	1.80%	64.70%	33.50%	100.00%	
			Low	Moderate	High	Total	
Age	<= 20 Years	Count	5	181	96	282	
		% of Total	1.50%	54.20%	28.70%	84.40%	
	> 21 Years	Count	1	35	16	52	0.899
		% of Total	0.30%	10.50%	4.80%	15.60%	
Total		Count	6	216	112	334	
		% of Total	1.80%	64.70%	33.50%	100.00%	
			Low	Moderate	High	Total	
Faculty	FBS	Count	0	4	1	5	
		% of Total	0.00%	1.20%	0.30%	1.50%	
	FEB	Count	1	18	10	29	
		% of Total	0.30%	5.40%	3.00%	8.70%	
	FIPP	Count	3	144	77	224	
		% of Total	0.90%	43.10%	23.10%	67.10%	0.576
	FISIPHOL	Count	2	31	10	43	
		% of Total	0.60%	9.30%	3.00%	12.90%	
	FMIPA	Count	0	19	14	33	
		% of Total	0.00%	5.70%	4.20%	9.90%	
Total		Count	6	216	112	334	
		% of Total	1.80%	64.70%	33.50%	100.00%	

The analysis of the distribution of the Anxious Category based on gender, age, and faculty provides important insights into differences in anxiety levels among respondents. From a gender perspective, the data indicates that among 231 female respondents, the majority fall into the Moderate

category (42.20%), followed by 26.00% in the High category, and only 0.90% in the Low category. In comparison, among 103 male respondents, 22.50% fall into the Moderate category, 7.50% into the High category, and 0.90% into the Low category. A p-value of 0.041 reveals a significant relationship between gender and the distribution of the Anxious Category, suggesting that gender may influence individuals' anxiety levels.

Regarding age, respondents under 20 years old predominantly fall into the Moderate category (54.20%), followed by 28.70% in the High category and 1.50% in the Low category. For respondents aged 21 and above, most also fall into the Moderate category (10.50%), but only 4.80% are in the High category, and 0.30% in the Low category. However, the p-value of 0.899 indicates no significant relationship between age and anxiety distribution, suggesting that age does not substantially influence anxiety levels among respondents.

Faculty analysis reveals notable variations in anxiety levels. Students from the Faculty of Education and Psychology (FIPP) have the highest percentage in the Moderate category (43.10%) and 23.10% in the High category. Meanwhile, students from the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences (FMIPA) also predominantly fall into the Moderate category, but their percentage in the High category is significantly lower (4.20%). These findings highlight significant differences in anxiety levels across faculties, possibly reflecting the influence of academic, social, or environmental factors unique to each faculty. Further exploration is needed to understand these dynamics and their implications for student well-being.

DISCUSSION

Transitioning from high school to university often leads to increased social anxiety among new students, stemming from the need to adapt to unfamiliar social environments and heightened academic expectations. This transition can exacerbate pre-existing mental health issues and introduce new challenges, such as loneliness, withdrawal, and heightened anxiety (Aloka, 2024; Yulianti et al., 2020). The shift requires students to adjust not only academically but also socially and emotionally, posing stressors distinct from their prior experiences. Complex academic environments further elevate stress and anxiety levels, underscoring the critical role of socio-cultural adaptation in maintaining mental health. A lack of adjustment can exacerbate anxiety symptoms (Razgulin et al., 2023).

Social anxiety in new students often arises from fears of negative judgment and the desire for social acceptance. These fears can hinder interactions, impacting both academic and emotional adaptation. Students who avoid social situations are more likely to experience difficulties integrating into campus life, adversely affecting their mental well-being and academic performance (Arjanggi & Kusumaningsih, 2016; Bloomfield et al., 2023).

Influence of Gender, Age, and Faculty on Anxiety

The findings of this study highlight significant differences in social anxiety based on gender and faculty, while age shows no significant relationship. Gender plays a critical role in shaping anxiety levels, with women consistently reporting higher levels of anxiety across various contexts, including academic settings (Erfanmanesh, 2016; Gutierrez-Garsia & Contreras, 2013). This study aligns with these findings, identifying a significant relationship between gender and anxiety, suggesting that men and women experience social pressures differently. Research further indicates that women often experience higher rates of social anxiety due to societal and cultural factors, whereas men are typically encouraged to exhibit social dominance, which may mitigate anxiety (Naidu et al., 2023; Hofmann & Asnaani, 2010).

While age has been linked to variations in social anxiety, with younger individuals typically reporting higher levels due to transitional stress (Salmani et al., 2023), this study found no significant relationship between age and anxiety. This may be attributed to the narrow age range of respondents (18–20 years), limiting the potential for variation. Previous studies similarly suggest that age does not always correlate strongly with anxiety levels within specific demographic groups (Inglés et al., 2010; Bocar & Rachmawati, 2023).

Faculty affiliation, however, shows a significant relationship with anxiety levels. Students from faculties with high academic or social demands, such as psychology or education, report higher levels of anxiety, likely due to increased interpersonal interactions and academic pressures (Daneshniya et al., 2018). This study confirms such findings, with significant differences in anxiety levels observed across faculties, reflecting the influence of academic, social, and environmental factors.

Implications for Specific Aspects of Social Anxiety

Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) is prevalent among adolescents and young adults, particularly during significant social transitions such as entering university. FNE is often higher in women and students in social disciplines, where frequent interactions and social validation are required (Lei & Russell, 2021; Naidu et al., 2023). Similarly, avoidance of social situations with strangers is influenced by life experiences, self-confidence, and cultural factors, with women more likely to exhibit avoidance behaviors (Rumono & Tanduklangi, 2023).

General social avoidance is associated with low emotional intelligence, leading to maladaptive behaviors such as excessive internet use as a coping mechanism (Reichenberger & Blechert, 2018). Research indicates that social avoidance is more common in teenagers and women, reflecting greater susceptibility to social anxiety and isolation (Naidu et al., 2023).

Interventions and Recommendations

Effective interventions are essential to address social anxiety in students. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) has demonstrated efficacy in reducing social anxiety through techniques such as cognitive restructuring and in vivo exposure (Otte, 2011). Solution-Focused Group Counseling has also proven effective, with lasting reductions in social anxiety observed after short-term interventions (Sağar, 2021). Furthermore, mental health literacy campaigns and social skills training can enhance students' awareness and ability to manage anxiety, fostering better adaptation to social and academic environments (Ni & Jia, 2023). Educational institutions should prioritize easily accessible counseling services, targeted support programs tailored to gender and faculty-specific needs, and mental health literacy campaigns to reduce stigma and enhance coping mechanisms. By implementing these strategies, institutions can create a supportive and inclusive environment that promotes the long-term mental well-being of their students.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights significant factors influencing social anxiety among respondents. Gender emerges as a key determinant, with women showing a greater tendency to experience higher levels of social anxiety compared to men. In contrast, age and faculty do not consistently affect anxiety levels, suggesting their influence may vary depending on specific aspects of social anxiety. These findings emphasize the importance of considering gender in addressing social anxiety, while further research is needed to explore the nuanced roles of age and faculty in shaping the dynamics of this condition.

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