



ISSN No: 2319-5886

International Journal of Medical Research &  
Health Sciences, 2016, 5, 9S:275-281

## The Pattern to Predict Social Phobia Based On Social Self-Efficacy, Shyness and Coping Style in the Secondary School Students

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to determine predictors of social phobia through studying some social phobias predictors. In this study, shyness, social self-efficacy and coping styles were assessed as predictors of social phobia. 262 students of Tehran secondary education participates in this study. The students completed measures of social phobia, shyness and self-efficacy scales for social situations and coping style. After collecting the data, the results are analyzed using determining correlation coefficients and statistical model of simultaneous multivariable regression. The results showed that all three variables of shyness, social self-efficacy and coping style had a significant relationship with social phobia and the pattern of social phobia prediction comprised of shyness and emotion-focused coping style. Therefore, it can be concluded that the emotion-focused coping style and shyness can predict social phobia among secondary school students.

**Keywords:** social phobia, shyness, social self-efficacy, coping style

### INTRODUCTION

One of the main problems that has an important deterrent effect on the efficiency and dynamism of the young and prevents the healthy development of identity as well as intellectual and emotional prosperity and talents and abilities is difficulties in establishing social communication (1). Social anxiety disorder or social phobia is an anxiety disorder where a significant fear of social situations or performance in which the person or persons face with unfamiliar people or scrutiny from others, (2, 3), and one fears that perform an action that is embarrassing and humiliating. Diagnosis of social phobia usually require significant avoidance behavior with respect to one or more social status (2). Social anxiety is detected with fear of negative evaluation by others. In its severe form, social anxiety causes severe distress or functional impairment and is called social phobia in clinical diagnosis (4). The prevalence of social phobia in the general population is estimated between 2% to over 12%. There are gender differences in social phobia. The prevalence of social phobia is higher in girls than boys (5). Although there have been many studies about social phobia, it requires a better understanding of the origins of such fear (6). Contemporary cognitive models

of social phobia pose the assumption that people with social phobia consider social situations harmful and believe it will have catastrophic consequences in terms of social behavior (7). These patterns have raised some cognitive component in explaining social phobia, including the components of shyness and social self-efficacy (8).

In social situations, people have different perceptions of their ability to interact successfully with others. In other words, their self-efficacy beliefs reflect the level of social confidence (9). Social self-efficacy can be defined as one's confidence in one's ability to manage social interactions needed to create and maintain interpersonal relationships. Also, social self-efficacy is defined as one's personal perception related to his/her performance in interpersonal relationships (10). Social self-efficacy was formed based on Bandura's theory (1977) (9). Social self-efficacy is not merely an important factor in effective social behavior, it is also important for psychological adjustment and mental health (11).

One of the variables that is important in predicting social phobia is shyness which can be defined as the appearance of discomfort and inhibition in the presence of others, an important variable that prevents interpersonal communication processes. Shy people tend to have their negative assessment of themselves and this assessment is more specific in relation with others (12). Shyness is one of the problems that most teens have in mind and one of the main reasons of problems in communicating students that leads to problems such as academic failure and inability to use potential abilities (1). Shyness is a condition in a person that is specified by excessive preoccupation and concern about social evaluation and subsequently, behavioral inhibition, withdrawal and avoidance. Shy people often speak little, little eye contact and sit away from others during social interactions and have more negative thoughts (13). Another important variable in predicting social phobia is coping style. Coping style refers to one's trying to adjust a stressful position (3). Lazarus and colleagues presented a theory about stress and coping styles. According to their theory, individual adaptation and coping with stress involves both cognitive assessment or stressful evaluation factors and then try to deal with those factors (14). Researchers often emphasize different types or classifications of coping styles, including problem-oriented versus emotion-focused style, confrontation versus avoidance and active coping style versus passive coping style (15).

According to Wright, Robin, Hook, Rayf and Nevin (15), social anxiety is one of the consequences of different coping styles and a certain kind of coping could lead to changes in social anxiety symptoms and in the treatment of anxiety and social phobia, the use of compatible and suitable coping styles are emphasized (16). Emotion-focused and avoidant-focused styles are prominent components in models of social anxiety. Clinical evidence and studies show that people with social anxiety often avoid from social situations to cope with the anxiety caused by this situation (6) and avoidant and emotion coping style often used by these people and using the avoidance style of social situations can be anxiety-provoking to keep the disruption to a person (3).

Merit, Boag and Warbreton (2014) in a study investigated the relationship between coping styles and social anxiety. Results of their study showed that people with social anxiety are introverts and use more avoidant coping style (6). Lia, Lu and Zhang (2014) studied the relationship between coping styles and social anxiety. Their results showed that people with negative coping style have higher loneliness and social anxiety (17). Roudbakh (2006) evaluated the efficacy and social behavior. The results showed there is a negative correlation between self-efficacy and avoidance behaviors in social anxiety people. The subjects who had lower efficacy are more avoidant of speaking in public than other subjects (18). Gadibanou and Herbert (2003) also examined the relationship between social anxiety and self-efficacy. The results showed a significant negative correlation between social anxiety and self-efficacy (19). Koukousi (2001) in their study found that people with high social anxiety and have social phobia more use of emotion-focused coping style (3).

Galilians, Mostafavi and Sharifirad (2013) showed in their study that low self-efficacy perception is related to emotion-focused coping strategies as well as symptoms of anxiety and disorders (20). Hasanvand Amouzadeh (2012) concluded in his study that efficacy and inhibitions is associated with social phobia and shyness is the best predictor of social phobia among male students (21). Research results if Bakhtiarpour, Heydari and Alipour (2011), explored the relationship between general self-efficacy and social anxiety, showed that there is a significant negative relationship between general self-efficacy and social anxiety, and general self-efficacy can be a predictor of social anxiety (22). Taherifat, Fani and Gharaie (2010) concluded during their study that there is a significant relationship between social phobia and self-efficacy and social inhibitions is more able to predict social phobia (8, 23). Given what mentioned above, it is clear that the relationship between social phobia with any of the variables is investigated, but the role of all three variables of social self-efficacy, shyness and social phobia in predicting social

phobia among students has not been studied and a pattern in this regard has not been drawn. For this reason, the present study is conducted to predict social phobia based on three variables of social self-efficacy, coping style and shyness and to determine the weight of each of these variables used to predict social phobia. And the research question was whether the social efficacy, shyness and social phobia are able to predict coping style and what are the contribution of each of these variables in predicting social phobia?

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research method is descriptive and correlational and social phobia was criterion variable and shyness and social self-efficacy and coping style were predictive variables. The study population consisted of all secondary school students living in Pakdasht city of Tehran in the academic year 2014-15 who were enrolled in schools in the city. The sampling method was in random sampling that first among the secondary schools of Pakdasht city, eight schools (4 girls and 4 boys) were chosen in random sampling method and then to 8 school were chosen, and among the students of those schools, 262 secondary school students were selected by simple random sampling method and participated in the study.

### Research Tools:

**Social Phobia Scale:** This scale was made by Connor (2000, citing from Taherifar et al, 2010) to assess social phobia. Social Phobia Inventory is a 17-point self-assessment scale which has three subscales of phobia (6 points), avoidance (7 points) and physiological disorders (4 points) in which each point is ranked based on five degree Likert scale (0 = no, 1 = low, 2 = somewhat, 3 = high, 4 = very much) (8). This questionnaire has high reliability and validity. Its reliability with test-retest method in the groups with diagnosis of social phobias equal to 0.78 to 0.89 and its coefficient of internal consistency (alpha coefficients) has been reported in a normal group of 0.94 and for sub-scales of fear 0.89, avoidance 0.91 and physiological discomfort 0.80 have been reported.

**Social self-efficacy scale of teens:** Teens social self-efficacy questionnaire was made in 1989 by Kennelly to assess the teens' efficacy. The questionnaire consists of 25 items that subscales such as social assertiveness, performance in social situations, participating in community groups, aspects of friendship and intimacy and helping or taking assistance. The questionnaire method of scoring is based on the 7-point Likert spectrum. Rezai et al (2014) studied face and content validity of the instrument, adolescents' self-efficacy reliability questionnaire using Cronbach's alpha was calculated that it amounts to 0.82 (25).

**Shyness scale:** The tool used to measure shyness was 44-question version of shyness scale made by Samoie (2003), in which respondents reported their level of shyness to each question of the questionnaire according to its current state and on a 5 point Likert scale (0 = never, 4 = always). In this scale, score ranges from zero to 176. How to interpret the scores on these tests are in reverse; that is to say, the higher the subject achieves a score, the less shyness it shows and the less the score is achieved, the more will be shyness. The reliability coefficients of the test using the Cronbach's alpha for female students was 0.86, for male males 0.8 and for total population of 83 students was reported 0.83. The questionnaire's reliability has been calculated as 0.70 by split half method. Test-retest reliability of this questionnaire was calculated by re-implementing the questionnaire at an interval of three weeks as 0.97 (1).

**Coping with stress scale:** this questionnaire is a 66-point test that has been made by Lazarus and Folkman (1985). Each expression is replied in a 4-point Likert scale. The test has eight sub-scales: a direct confrontation, distancing, self-control, seeking social support, accepting responsibility, avoidance, planned problem solving and positive reappraisal. Finally, the questionnaire in two clusters of problem-focused strategies and emotion-focused strategies were classified. Zine El Abidine (2004) and Hashem Zadeh (2006) obtained the reliability of the test as 0.79 and 0.89, respectively. Zarei and Asadi (2011) obtained Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this questionnaire as 0.82 (26). The implementation method was such that first the concerned schools are referred and students participating in the study were asked to respond to questionnaires. After collecting data using correlation coefficients and simultaneous multivariate regression analysis, the data were analyzed.

## RESULTS

Data obtained from 262 students (including 138 boys and 124 girls high school students) were analyzed that the descriptive indicators of shyness, social self-efficacy, coping styles and social phobia scores are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Descriptive characteristics of shyness, social self-efficacy, coping scales and social phobia**

Scale	Mean	Standard deviation	minimum	maximum
Shyness	95.35	16.27	60	139
Social self-Efficacy	107.82	20.23	48	162
Problem-focused coping	31.28	8.30	4	59
Emotion-focused coping	35.26	9.15	6	62
Social Phobia	20.53	10.17	0	45

To investigate the relationships between variables, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used. The results are presented in Table 2. Results of Table 2 shows that there is an inverse and significant relationship between shyness ( $r = -0.437/0$ ) and social self-efficacy ( $r = -0.163/0$ ) with social phobia of students ( $P \leq 0.01/0$ ). Also, there is a direct significant relationship between emotion-focused coping style ( $r = 0.130$ ) and social phobia of students ( $P \leq 0.05/0$ ). In other words, by reducing shyness and social self-efficacy scores and increasing scores of emotion-focused coping style among students, social phobia scores also increased and vice versa. But, no significant relationship between problem-focused coping style and students' social phobia.

**Table 2: Scores of shyness, social self-efficacy, coping styles with social phobia**

	Variables	Number	Correlation coefficient	Significance level
Social phobia	Shyness	262	-0.437	0.001
	Social self-Efficacy	262	-0.163	0.004
	Problem-focused coping	262	0.075	0.115
	Emotion-focused coping	262	0.130	0.018

Also, to determine the contribution of each of the shyness, social self-efficacy and coping styles factors in predicting social phobia, simultaneous multivariate regression was used that its results can be seen in Table 3.

**Table 3: Results of regression analysis to predict social phobia of students through shyness, social self-sufficiency and coping styles**

Variable	F	R	R <sup>2</sup>	B	$\beta$	P
fixed	20.227	0.489	0.239	42.340	-	0.001
shyness				-0.284	-0.455	0.001
Self-sufficiency				-0.033	0.030	0.262
Problem-focused coping				-0.002	0.092	0.984
Emotion-focused coping				0.254	0.229	0.003

Table 3 summarizes the multivariate regression analysis to predict social phobia of students by shyness, social self-efficacy and coping styles. Assuming that R<sup>2</sup> is the percentage of common variance of shyness, social self-efficacy and coping styles in predicting social phobia of students. The above table shows that the total of variables used (shyness, social self-efficacy and coping styles) predicted 24% of the variance in students' social phobia. Given that calculated F is significant at less than 0.01, the linear regression model is significant. Results of regression analysis shows that shyness in ( $\alpha = 0.01/0$ ) level is able to predict social phobia of students in a negative and significant way. Also, emotion-focused coping style at the level of  $\alpha = 0.01$  is able to predict social phobia in positive and significant method and t-test for significance of regression coefficients at levels less than 0.01 is significant. Since  $\beta$  is standardized regression coefficient, it was found that shyness with determination coefficients -0.445 has the highest level of effectiveness in predicting students' social phobia.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the present study, the results showed that shyness and social self-efficacy had a significant negative relationship with social phobia. In other words, these results show that the more the score of shyness and self-efficacy among individuals, the less the level of social phobia among them and vice versa. It should be noted that the interpretation of shyness scores in this study was reverse, that is, higher scores in this scale show less shyness and less score in this scale shows more shyness. Therefore, it can be concluded that with the increase if shyness score in the test which shows less shyness in the person, one's social phobia is reduced. Also, among coping styles with stress, emotion-focused coping style had a direct significant relationship with social phobia, but the relationship between problem-oriented coping styles with social phobia was not significant. Therefore, the more people use emotion-focused coping styles, the more they experience social phobia.

Then, the weight of each of these variables to predict social phobia was discussed and determined. For this purpose, statistical multivariate regression method was used. The results showed that the total of variables used (shyness, social self-efficacy and coping styles) are able to predict 24% of the variance in social phobia among students. Scores of shyness were able to predict students' social phobia in an inverse and significant method. Also, emotion-coping style was able to predict students' social phobia in a direct and significant method and it was found that scores of shyness with a coefficient of determination (-0.455) had the highest degree of effectiveness in predicting students' social phobia and then emotion-focused coping style with coefficients 0.229 was able to predict social phobia and social self-efficacy was exited from prediction pattern. Therefore, it can be generally said that shyness and emotion-focused coping style can be effective students' social phobia.

The results of this study in the context of the relationship between shyness and social phobia and more contribution of social phobia is consistent with the theories raised by Pilkounis (1977, citing from Sioitsi, 2010) and Prakash and Kaplan (2003) (12, 13) and is consistent with the research done by Hasanvand Aouzadeh (2012) and Taherifar et.al (2010) (8, 21). To explain these findings, it can be said that according to various studies (including Taherifar et al., 2010; Hyser, Turner and Biddle, 2003), shyness overlaps with anxiety or social phobia in many respects (8 and 27). According to the research conducted, shyness is associated with symptoms such as fear, avoidance and physiological discomfort, which these symptoms are core symptoms of social anxiety as well. Additionally, shy people have unpleasant thoughts dealing with social situations and avoiding this situation, so that these people have demonstrated extreme sensitivity in social functions. People with social phobia also have extreme and persistent fear of social situations and avoid these situations (21). So, it seems that due to these shares between shyness and social phobia, shyness variable can predict more social phobia compared with variables of social self-sufficiency and coping style. Also, this research showed that social self-sufficiency has a negative significant relationship with social phobia that is consistent with research results achieved by Taherifar et.al, 2010, Roudbakh, 2006, Gadibano and Herbert, 2003, Bakhtiarpour et.al, 2011, Khayer et.al, 2008 (8, 18, 19, 22, 23).

To explain these findings, it can be said that self-efficacy refers to a person's perceived ability to perform arbitrary; that is to say, one's assessment on one's ability in a situation influence one's decisions on performing or avoiding from that situation. And since the fear of negative evaluation among affected with social anxiety prevents out breaking their capabilities, the one who draws to avoidance, passivity and finally inability to perform functional activities. Therefore, it is possible that the common factor in social structures and low self-sufficiency is the inability in understanding competencies and personal adequacies as well as false belief about the lack of success in social activities (21). In explaining exiting social self-sufficiency variable of the prediction pattern, Repi and Spense theory (2004, citing from Taherifar et.al, 2010) can be mentioned. They believe that social self-efficacy compared to other cognitive variables has less important role in predicting social phobia. And the results of research in this regard is in line with this theory and with the results of Taherifar et al. (2010) is also somewhat similar (8).

The results of the present study also showed that emotion-focused coping style was positively associated with social phobia and is able to predict social phobia which this result is consistent with the research conducted by Kokouski, 2001, Right et.al, 2010, Lia et.al, 2014 and Jalilian et.al, 2013 (3, 16, 17, 20). In explaining these findings, it should be noted that among the factors that are leading to psychological stress, coping style has always been a significant factor (28). Stress-focused diseases (including social phobia) and worsening of general health can be seen in those who consistently meet their emotional (29). In fact, if coping styles focus on negative thoughts and emotions, it causes increased anxiety and mental stress (28). Also, avoidance and inaction are two features that use emotion-focused coping style. Denying stressful situation will lead to avoidance behavior and inaction in dealing with stressful situation and inability to exercise potential capabilities and one's initiatives. Using coping strategies prevent one from effective direct conflict with the problem and reduce his ability to solve the problem. This situation impairs intellectual coherence and emotional distress and reduces mental health of a person and increase one's anxiety (30). It seems that it is for this reason that emotion-focused coping styles are able to predict social phobia. In general, this study showed that shyness and coping styles are good predictors of social phobia. This indicates that according to these variables, risk of occurring social phobia among high school students can be predicted. Therefore, those in charge of education and clinicians can have an effective and useful role in controlling and reducing their social phobia by training effective coping styles and training strategies to reduce the amount of shyness among students.

**Acknowledgment**

All secondary school students in Tehran participated in the research and Education in Tehran to cooperate in the implementation of the study would be appreciated.

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