

SOCIAL APPEARANCE ANXIETY AND ITS ASSOCIATION WITH EATING DISORDER SYMPTOMS AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

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ABSTRACT

Social appearance anxiety is a less explored concept in predicting eating disorder symptomatology, this study examined the relationship between social appearance anxiety (which refers to the fear of being negatively judged by others for one's physical appearance) and eating disorder symptomatology as well as gender and stream based differences in these variables. The study sample consisted of 180 participants between the age group of 18 to 25 (30 males, 30 females) from each stream (science, commerce, arts) who completed the Social Appearance Anxiety Scale (SAAS) and EAT-26 Scale. Data was analyzed using t-tests and Pearson correlation. Result revealed a significant positive correlation between SAAS and eating disorder symptoms ($r=0.37, p < 0.001$), indicating that higher social anxiety is associated with greater eating disorder behaviors. No significant difference was found for SAAS scores with respect to gender and stream. However, eating disorder symptoms differed significantly between males and females, with female reporting higher levels. Stream based difference in eating disorder symptoms were not significant. Preliminary findings suggest that while social appearance anxiety does not vary across academic streams or gender, it is meaningfully linked to eating disorder symptoms and gender plays a role in disordered eating behavior. The study thus highlights the importance of addressing body image concerns and eating patterns among young adults, especially females.

KEY WORDS: Social Appearance Anxiety, Eating Disorder Symptoms, Gender Differences, Stream wise differences

INTRODUCTION

Social Appearance Anxiety is very common in today's young adults it refers to "Apprehension about others' evaluations, distress over their negative evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively" (Watson & Friend, 1969). Concerns about body image and what other people will think of me have increasingly become central to the lives of young adults in today's world, Young adults are very prevalent to social appearance anxiety, a study in China found that 59.03% of university students reported anxiety about their appearance. (Liu et al., 2023), Increased use of social appearance anxiety are believed to be linked to various reasons like social media usage, Higher social media use is associated with higher body dissatisfaction, in a representative sample of adults. (Matthew D. Marques et al., 2021), increased use of AR, low self esteem, a research has found Body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem are strongly linked in adolescents across gender, age, weight status, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. (Patricia van den Berg, 2010) Perfectionism, especially concern over mistakes and organization, is associated with greater body dissatisfaction in women. (Tracey D Wade and Marika Tiggemann, 2013), moreover internalization of media norms, societal beauty standards, peer pressure, live events, environment all of this contributes to negative body perception and social appearance anxiety.

Social appearance anxiety leads to various psychological as well as physical problems, Social appearance anxiety is positively correlated with and predicts loneliness in Turkish university students. (Osman Amil, 2015), it also leads to life dissatisfaction, According to one study High social appearance anxiety is associated with low life satisfaction, while self-esteem has a weak relationship with both (Yasar Demir, 2024), it also leads to depression, Social appearance anxiety and automatic thoughts are positively related to depression, anxiety, and stress in emerging adults. (Esranur Çelik Özlem Tolan, 2021), and last but not least it also leads to various eating disorders.

Eating disorders are complex, real medical illnesses with psychological and biological causes that can lead to severe health complications. (A. Mishra et al., 2009) An eating disorder is marked by extremes. It is present when a person experiences severe disturbances in eating behavior, such as extreme reduction of food intake or extreme overeating, or feelings of extreme distress or concern about body weight or shape. Eating disorders frequently appear

during adolescence or young adulthood(A. Mishra et al., 2009), They frequently co-exist with other psychiatric disorders such as depression, substance abuse, or anxiety disorders. People with eating disorders also can suffer from numerous other physical health complications, such as heart conditions or kidney failure, which can lead to death(R. Kumari et al. , 2009). Thus it leads to several body and health deterioration .

Social Appearance anxiety and Eating disorder symptoms are highly correlated. In a study SAA was positively associated with body dissatisfaction and bulimia nervosa (Levinson,Rodebaugh,2012). , Similarly women with Bulimia Nervosa have significantly higher SAAS scores than HC , in women with Bulimia nervosa , SAAS scores showed significant positive correlation with global eating disorders sub scales and dietary restraints.(Triada Konstantina Papapanou , 2023) .

In India , these issues are becoming increasingly visible, though systematic research on Indian population is less of SAAS, with globalization and urbanization, young Indians are exposed to western ideals of beauty , with thinness often emphasized for women and muscularity for men , Eating disorders once limited to western societies are now prevalent in developing countries also (Gupta et al., 2019).

Traditionally women have been considered more vulnerable to appearance related anxiety and disordered eating , however now men also experience significant appearance pressure , albeit sometimes in different form such as striving for muscular body rather than thin body (Murray et al., 2017). This makes it important to include both male and female as subjects for both social appearance anxiety and eating disorder .Academic stream may also play a role in influencing SAA and eating behaviors as students with arts , commerce and science all are exposed to different learning and atmosphere .

Taken together existing study highlights SSA as important predictor for eating disorder behaviors and fills certain gaps like limited research is done on social appearance anxiety on Indian population, moreover very less studies almost none take into consideration academic streams variations and also less researches includes both males and females most of the study are done only on female population.

Objectives

To analyze gender differences in SSA among college students.

To analyze stream-based differences (arts, commerce, science) in SSA.

To analyze gender differences in eating disorder symptoms.

To analyze stream-based differences in eating disorder symptoms.

To examine the correlation between SSA and eating disorder symptoms

HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis

There will be no significant difference between male and female students with regards to their SSA.

There will be no significant difference between Arts and commerce students with regards to their SSA.

There will be no significant difference between Arts and science students with regards to their SSA.

There will be no significant difference between commerce and science students with regards to their SSA

There will be no significant difference between male and female students with regards to their Eating.

There will be no significant difference between Arts and commerce students with regards to their Eating.

There will be no significant difference between Arts and science students with regards to their Eating.

There will be no significant difference between commerce and science students with regards to their Eating.

There will be no significant correlation between SSA and Eating among students

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

The final sample consisted of 180 students between the age group of 18 to 25 (Mean age= 20.27, SD=1.55), after excluding the responses of those who opted for diploma or not meeting the age criteria and certain extra males and females in each stream during the data screening process in order to maintain sample consistency and to maintain equal number of samples with respect to gender and streams (30 females per stream and 30 males per stream

).Thus there were 90 males and 90 females and stream wise distribution included arts(n=60) , science (n=60), and commerce (n=60).

MEASURES

Social Appearance Anxiety Scale (SAAS) by Hart et al.,2008was used to measure the social appearance anxiety, it is a 16 item , 5-point Likert type self report questionnaire, created to measure the anxiety about being negatively evaluated by others because of of ones overall appearance, including body shape. Higher scores indicates higher anxiety. The scales has shown excellent reliability across studies with a Cronbach'salpha typically between .94 to .96.

Eating attitude test (EAT-26)by Garner et al.,1982 was used to check disordered eating behaviors, it is a 26 items standardized screening measure to help you determine whether you might have an eating disorder that needs Professional attention. Items are rated on a 6 point scalewith all the question scored as per number only 26th question is scored reverse. Score>20 signals risk of eating disorder, higher the scored higher the disordered eating tendencies.Eat 26 has been widely validated and has been used across wide cultural settingand demonstrates high internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha value ranging from 0.80 to 0.94 across different samples.

PROCEDURE

Data was collected using Google Form that consisted of purpose of study ,demographic details , SAAS and EAT-26 , all questions were set as compulsory ensuring there are no incomplete responses, participation was voluntary , consent was attached in the beginning of the form ensuring them the confidentiality of their data ,only after they ticked the yes option the form was displayed.Necessary information and instructions were provided in typed form and participants were requested to fill up as per the instructions for properly filling the scale.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Data was analyzed using independent sample t tests to assess the difference in SAAS score and EAT-26 scores with respect to gender and streams. Pearson's correlation was used to examine the association between the Social Appearance Anxiety and eating disorder behaviors.

RESULTS :

TABLE 1:

SAA scores of males and females

	N	Mean	SD	't' value	Table value	Level of significant
Male	90	36.48	14.11	0.77	1.98	NS
Female	90	34.88	13.79			

According to table 1., the mean score of male students (M=36.48, SD=14.11) is thus slightly higher than that of Female (M=34.88,SD=13.79) however the calculated 't' value is 0.77 which is less than Table value that is 1.98 at the 0.05 level, indicating that the difference between the SAA scores of males and females is not significant. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted.

TABLE 2:

SAA scores of arts and commerce students

	N	Mean	SD	't' value	Table value	Level of significant
Arts	60	38.55	14.89	1.51	1.98	NS
Commerce	60	34.88	14.37			

According to table 2., the mean score and SD of Arts students are (M= 38.55,SD=14.89) and of commerce students are (M=34.52 ,SD= 14.37). The 't' value calculated is (1.51) which is less than the table value (1.98) thus the difference between SAA score of arts and commerce students is not statistically significant at 0.05 level. Thus null hypothesis is accepted.

TABLE 3:

SAA scores of arts and science students

	N	Mean	SD	't' value	Table value	Level of significant
Arts	60	38.55	14.89	1.85	1.98	NS
Science	60	33.97	12.17			

According to table 3., the mean score and SD of Arts students are ($M=38.55, SD=14.89$) and of science students are ($M=33.97, SD=12.17$). The 't' value calculated is (1.85) which is less than the table value (1.98) thus, the difference is not statistically significant at 0.05 level. Thus null hypothesis is accepted.

TABLE 4:

SAA scores of commerce and science students

	N	Mean	SD	't' value	Table value	Level of significant
Commerce	60	34.52	14.37	0.23	1.98	NS
Science	60	33.97	12.17			

According to table 4., the mean score and SD of commerce students are ($M=34.52, SD=14.37$) and of science students are ($M=33.97, SD=12.17$). The 't' value calculated is (0.23) which is far less than the table value (1.98) thus, the difference between SAA score of commerce and science students is not statistically significant at 0.05 level. Thus null hypothesis is accepted.

TABLE 5:

EAT 26 score of males and females

	N	Mean	SD	't' value	Table value	Level of significant
Males	90	16.98	15.56	2.03	1.98	0.05
Females	90	12.97	10.53			

According to table 5., the mean score of male students ($M=16.98, SD=15.56$) is thus slightly higher than that of Female ($M=12.97, SD=10.53$), the calculated 't' value is 2.03 which is greater than Table value that is 1.98 at the 0.05 level, indicating that the difference between the eating attitude scores of males and females is significant. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected.

TABLE 6:

EAT 26 score of arts and commerce students

	N	Mean	SD	't'	Table	Level of
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				value	value	significant
Arts	60	13.65	10.97	0.67	1.98	NS
Commerce	60	15.3	15.60			

According to table 6., Arts students mean ($M=13.65, SD=10.97$) is slightly lower than the mean scores of commerce students ($M=15.30, S=15.60$). However the calculated t value (0.67) is less than the table value (1.98) at the 0.05 level. Thus there is no significant difference in the eating attitude of students of arts and commerce stream and hence the null hypothesis is accepted.

TABLE 7:

EAT 26 scores of arts and science students

	N	Mean	SD	't' value	Table value	Level of significant
Arts	60	13.65	10.97	1.04	1.98	NS
Science	60	15.97	13.35			

According to table 7., Arts students mean ($M=13.65, SD=10.97$) is slightly lower than the mean scores of science students ($M=15.97, S=13.35$). However the calculated t value (1.04) is less than the table value (1.98) at the 0.05 level. Thus there is no significant difference in the eating attitude of students of arts and science stream and hence the null hypothesis is accepted.

TABLE 8:

EAT 26 scores of commerce and science students

	N	Mean	SD	't' value	Table value	Level of significant
Commerce	60	15.97	13.35	0.25	1.98	NS
Science	60	15.3	15.60			

According to table 8. , Commerce student's mean score is ($M=15.30, S=15.60$) and the mean scores of science students is ($M=15.97, S=13.35$). Thus there is no major difference in their mean score. However the calculated t value (0.25) is very less than the table value (1.98) at

the 0.05 level .Thus there is no significant difference in the eating attitude of students of commerce and science stream and hence the null hypothesis is accepted.

TABLE 9:

Correlation between SAA scores and disordered eating scores

	N	Mean	r value	Table value	Level of significant
SAA	180	35.67778	0.372326	0.1428	0.05
EAT	180	14.97222			

In Table 9., the calculated r value(0.372326) is more than the table value (0,1428) which is significant at 0.05 level .Thus the null hypothesis is rejected.

DISCUSSION

The current study focused on the relationship between social appearance anxiety and disordered eating patterns in young adults. Social appearance anxiety is very common among this age group and this study confirms to it almost 50% of the women and 54% of males were found to have social appearance anxiety, in most of the studies related to body image concerns females reported higher body image concerns,however in present study , male students reported slightly higher levels of social appearance anxiety compared to females, although the difference is not significant. A possible explanation could be that females experience more internal body related dissatisfaction (eg dissatisfaction with height and weight) whereas males may be more concerned with external social evaluation (how other perceives their appearance in social context).

Similarly while prior research often identifies females as more vulnerable to eating disorders, the present study found that males reported significantly higher disorder eating symptoms(Females 21.1% Males 31%). One possible reason is that EAT-26 measures disordered eating attitudes rather than clinical eating disorders. Males may endorse items related to dietary control or , excessive eating or performance oriented eating patterns, which could elevate their scores, even though they might not actually have a clinical disorder .

Another finding is that ,no significant differences were found across academic streams (science, commerce, arts)neither in social appearance anxiety score nor in the eating attitude scores thus this suggests that concerns about appearance anxiety or eating attitudes are not influenced by the streams.

Last and the most important finding suggests that there is a significant positive correlation between social appearance anxiety and disordered eating attitudes. This finding supports the argument that heightened anxiety about being negatively judged by others for one's appearance can directly contribute to maladaptive eating behaviors and eating disorder symptoms as students whether male or female who fear external negative evaluation may engage in restrictive diets, binge eating or other unhealthy behaviors in an attempt to conform to the so called beauty standards set in the society.

We can see that almost 50% of females and 54% Males have high scored on SAAS. This shows how much young adults have the anxiety of how they would be perceived by others, urbanization, exposure to western media, peer comparisons, so called beauty standards, increased usage of augmented reality all this contributes to the high scored of social appearance anxiety which in turn leads to unhealthy eating attitudes which would lead to eating disorders.

LIMITATIONS

Only samples from Ahmedabad were taken so results cannot be generalized widely.

Both of the questionnaires were self report scales, which may be subject to social desirability bias.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that social appearance anxiety is highly prevalent among young adults irrespective of gender, moreover there is high correlation between social appearance anxiety and disordered eating attitudes in young adults, while gender differences appeared in eating disorder symptoms, no gender differences were seen in SAA. Stream wise differences were not found either in SAA nor in eating disorder symptoms. Thus these findings underscore the need to recognize SAA as an important psychological factor influencing disordered eating attitudes in young adults.

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