

<https://doi.org/10.48047/AFJBS.6.14.2024.7529-7539>



African Journal of Biological Sciences

Journal homepage: <http://www.afjbs.com>



Research Paper

Open Access

## A Study on Association between Social Anxiety and Body Image among College Going Girls

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Volume 6, Issue 14, Aug 2024

Received: 15 June 2024

Accepted: 25 July 2024

Published: 15 Aug 2024

doi: [10.48047/AFJBS.6.14.2024.7529-7539](https://doi.org/10.48047/AFJBS.6.14.2024.7529-7539)

### Abstract

Anxiety in social situations is increased in people who are dissatisfied with their bodies because they tend to give themselves negative evaluations and worry that others will feel the same way about them. The present study examined the association between Social Anxiety and Body Image among college-going girls. A cross-sectional study among 209 college-going girls was carried out at Banaras Hindu University and Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth University, Varanasi, India. The findings of the study showed that 49.8% of college-going girls reported social anxiety under specific situations, 22.5% of respondents experienced it frequently, or in many situations, whereas 37.3% of respondents found mild concern regarding their body image, 16.3% were moderate concern and 4.3% of respondents were found heavy concern about their body image. The study highly recommended professional assistance, such as counselling or cognitive-behavioural therapy, which can benefit anyone struggling with these issues.

**Keywords:** Body image, social anxiety, dissatisfaction, negative-evaluation, concern.

### Introduction

Social anxiety disorder is characterised by fear and unease about other people's reactions in social settings. According to **National Institute of Mental Health**, Social anxiety disorder (formerly social phobia) is characterized by persistent fear of one or more social or performance situations in which the person is exposed to unfamiliar people or to possible scrutiny by others. The individual fears that he or she will act in a way (or show anxiety symptoms) that will be mortifying and humiliating. Excessive dread of unfavourable assessment, such as embarrassment or rejection from others, is the foundation of social anxiety. People with social anxiety typically stay away from crowds out of fear of social criticism. Since social anxiety affects everyone impartially but to varying degrees of severity, everyone is

susceptible to it at any moment. An individual suffering from social anxiety may experience discomfort, embarrassment, worry, and negative thoughts regarding unfavourable outcomes when interacting with others. **(Faradicha & Permanasari 2024)**

Young adults experience higher levels of anxiety due to their fear of social rejection. Due in large part to the social pressure women face from society and culture to please others in order to be accepted by their community, anxiety disorders affect women more customarily than men. Most girls view the occurrence of catcalling (verbal sexual harassment) as natural. Women were unwilling to push back against unsavoury behaviour, such as verbal sexual harassment, because of this cultural pressure **(Muharram et al., 2023)**.

The influence that society plays in the shaping of body image is crucial. As society changes, one can observe trends in the evolving definition of the perfect body. The ideal female form from Renaissance paintings and prehistoric sculptures used to represent attractive women as chubby or obese, but today's ideal female body is incredibly slim. In contrast, the ideal male body is muscular. To blend in, the person aspires to this idealised social body image **(Farsole et al., 2023)**.

Body image is a crucial component in the building of self-concept. According to **American Psychological Association (2018)** The mental picture one forms of one's body as a whole, including its physical characteristics (body percept) and one's attitudes toward these characteristics (body concept). Negative body image, also known as body dissatisfaction, is experienced by those who have low self-esteem and high levels of discontent with their bodies. It can harm a person's social life and mental health. Individuals dissatisfied with their bodies tend to evaluate their appearance more negatively **(Barnier & Collison, 2019)** and worry that others will think negatively of them, making them more anxious in social situations **(Pawijit et al., 2019)**. Additionally, research revealed that compared to the healthy group, those with body dysmorphic disorder have higher levels of social avoidance and discomfort.

## **Objective**

To find out the association between social anxiety and body image among college-going girls.

## **Material and Methods**

### ***Study Design***

A cross-sectional study was conducted in Banaras Hindu University and Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth University, Varanasi, India.

### ***Study Population and Sample Size***

Participants were recruited using a convenient sampling method. Convenient sampling met the sample size requirement within the stipulated data collection period. Thus, a convenient sample of 209 students aged between 17 and 21. After consent was obtained, the students were interviewed face to face; any participant above the age of 21 was excluded from the study.

### ***Tools***

#### ***Questionnaires***

The questionnaire included demographic information (e.g., age, educational qualification, university, types of family), Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ) and Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS).

#### ***Body shape questionnaire (BSQ-8c)***

The Body Shape Questionnaire measures an individual's concerns about weight, body shape, appearance and dissatisfaction. It is a self-reported 8-item questionnaire consisting of questions regarding one's opinion about her body appearance over the past four weeks scored on a Likert scale of 1 to 6. The points for the scale are less than 19-no concern, 19-25- mild concern, 25-33-moderate concern, and over 33 marked heavy concern with body shape.

#### ***Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS-20)***

The SIAS, developed by Mattick and Clarke (1998), assesses social interaction anxiety. The SIAS is a self-report, 20-item measure of social interaction anxiety, which is characterised as "distress when meeting and talking with other people." This is a helpful tool for documenting social anxiety symptoms over time.

#### ***Statistical Analysis***

Data were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS) version 26.0 and presented as frequency and percentage. Mean, SD Chi-square test and Spearman correlation were used to find the association between Body Image and Social anxiety variables.

#### ***Ethical Considerations***

Ethical clearance of the study was obtained from the Research Ethical Committee, Institute of Science, Banaras Hindu University approved the study protocol.

### **Result and Discussion**

**Table No. 1 Distribution of respondents based on basic information.**

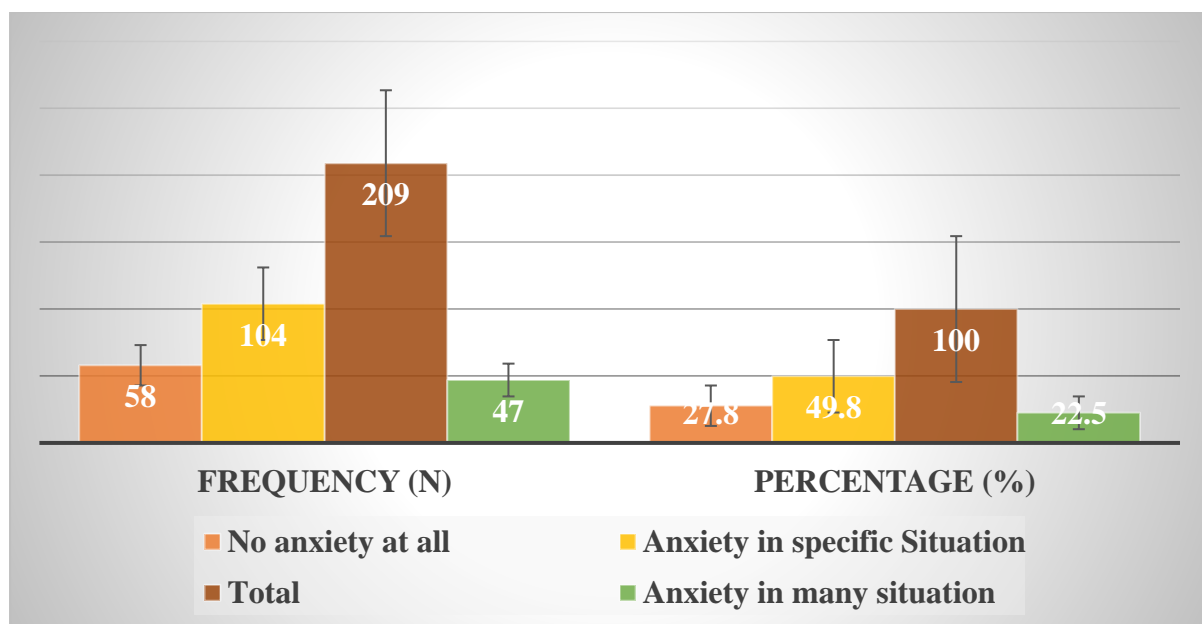
Variables	Frequency(n)	Percentage (%)	Mean±SD
<b>Age</b>			
17.0-18.0	66	31.6	19.25 ±1.127
18.1-19.0	51	24.4	
19.1-20.0	49	23.4	
20.1-21.0	43	20.6	
<b>Qualification</b>			
B.A.	90	43.1	1.80±.793
B.Sc.	70	33.5	
B. Com	49	23.4	
<b>University</b>			
BHU	112	56.6	1.46±.500
MGKVPU	97	46.4	
<b>Family type</b>			
Nuclear	124	59.33	1.41±.492
Joint	85	40.66	
<b>Total</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The above table shows the distribution of the respondents based on some basic information. The investigation involved 209 respondents in total. The respondent's average age was 19.25 ( $\pm 1.127$  years). More than half of the participants, 56.6%, were enrolled in BHU, whereas 46.4% were enrolled in MGKVPU; among them, 43.1% belonged to the Arts and social science stream, 33.5% to the Science stream, and 23.4% to the Commerce stream. Among them, the majority of the respondents belonged to the nuclear families, whereas 40.6% belonged to the joint families.

**Table No. 2 Distribution of respondents based on their Social Anxiety.**

Social anxiety	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Mean±SD
No anxiety at all	58	27.8	1.95±.709
Anxiety in specific Situation	104	49.8	

<b>Anxiety in many situation</b>	47	22.5	
<b>Total</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>100.0</b>	



**Figure No. 2 Distribution of respondents based on their Social Anxiety.**

The above table and graph depict the social anxiety among college-going girls; 49.8% reported anxiety under specific situations. Anxiety was experienced frequently or in many situations by 22.5% of respondents, and 27.8% reported that they do not have any social anxiety. According to the findings, social anxiety was common among college-going students with varied degrees of influence. Although over half only encounter worry in particular circumstances, a smaller percentage deals with it more generally. Additionally, a significant number 27.8% of the population reported no social anxiety at all. This demonstrates the variety of social anxiety and points to possible areas for focused assistance and intervention.

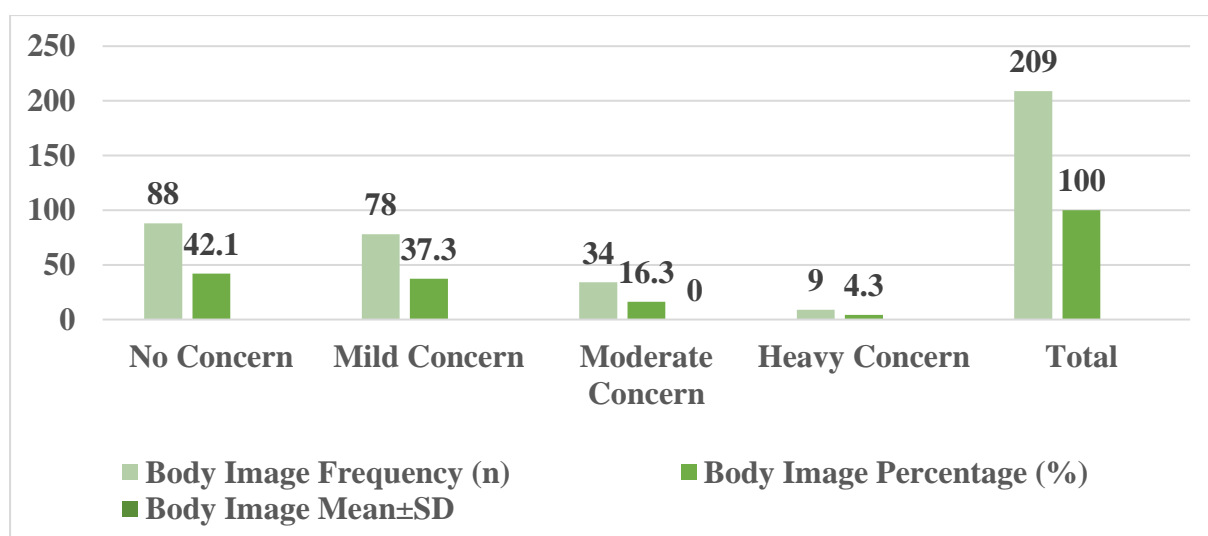
A study conducted by **Jefferies & Ungar, 2020** explored the global prevalence of social anxiety using a self-report survey of 6,825 individuals from seven countries: Brazil, China, Indonesia, Russia, Thailand, the United States, and Vietnam, selected for their diversity in culture and economics. It was shown that the prevalence of social anxiety was far higher than previously thought, with over one-third (36%) of respondents fulfilling the diagnostic criteria for social anxiety disorder (SAD). The prevalence and intensity of social anxiety symptoms varied depending on factors such as age, country, employment position, education level, and living in an urban or rural area. However, they did not differ significantly between the sexes.

Furthermore, 1 in 6 (18%) individuals reported they did not have social anxiety, although they nonetheless met or surpassed the SAD criteria, the study stated that social anxiety affects young adults globally, and many of them are unaware of the challenges they can face. Many young people may be dealing with significant interruptions to their functioning and well-being, which might be improved with the proper support and education.

In another research conducted by **Laldinpui et al., 2024** carried out in India, it was discovered that a higher percentage of first-year students (42.8%) than those in later grades had significant levels of social anxiety. Additionally, it was discovered that every social anxiety variable, including fear, avoidance, physiological arousal, poor communication, and low confidence, significantly influences the students' way of life. Social anxiety can negatively impact many facets of life, such as future job prospects, academic success, interpersonal connections, and emotional well-being.

**Table No. 3 Distribution of the respondents based on their Body Image.**

Body Image	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Mean±SD
No Concern	88	42.1	1.83±.854
Mild Concern	78	37.3	
Moderate Concern	34	16.3	
Heavy Concern	9	4.3	
<b>Total</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>100.0</b>	



**Figure No. 3 Distribution of the respondents based on their Body Image.**

The above table and graph describe the distribution of respondents based on their body image. 37.3% of respondents found mild concern regarding their body image. This implies that although these people experienced some degree of discontent, it was relatively low and had no bearing on their daily lives or feelings towards their self-esteem. Though they handle things well, they occasionally worry or feel slightly unsatisfied regarding their body image; 16.3% of the participants were found to have moderate concern regarding their body image, compared to individuals who have mild concerns; this group were more impacted by their body image. They always feel anxious or uncomfortable, which negatively impacts their self-image and day-to-day activities. This degree of concern significantly impacts their interactions with others and their mental health. 4.3% of respondents were found to be heavily concerned about their body image. This suggests that respondents have severe issues with body image-related distress. Their worries were serious and affected their general well-being, mental health, and sense of self. They experienced more severe problems with body image than the other groups. The largest group, 42.1% of respondents, were indifferent to their body image. These people have a positive perception of their bodies and do not think or feel anything nasty about how they are. It makes clear that very few but some participants are dealing with more severe body image concerns. In order to address these issues, it could be necessary to offer treatment or intervention to people dealing with moderate to severe issues. **Vasudeva, 2021** executed an investigation of the Indian populace suggested a noteworthy distinction in the levels of body image dissatisfaction between males and females, with the former having comparatively higher scores and the latter having lower levels of self-esteem. Furthermore, the result indicated that, whereas male participants were more interested in gaining weight and exercising, female participants were more eager to lose weight. **Rakesh et al., 2023** performed research to find correlation between familial obesity and the perception of one's body. The participant's visual analogue body perception is linked to several characteristics related to body image perception. Someone's impression of their body image influenced by psychological factors such as anxiety, insecurity, and attempts to alter their weight. These factors can also impact their mental health.

**Table No. 4 The association between Body image and Social Anxiety**

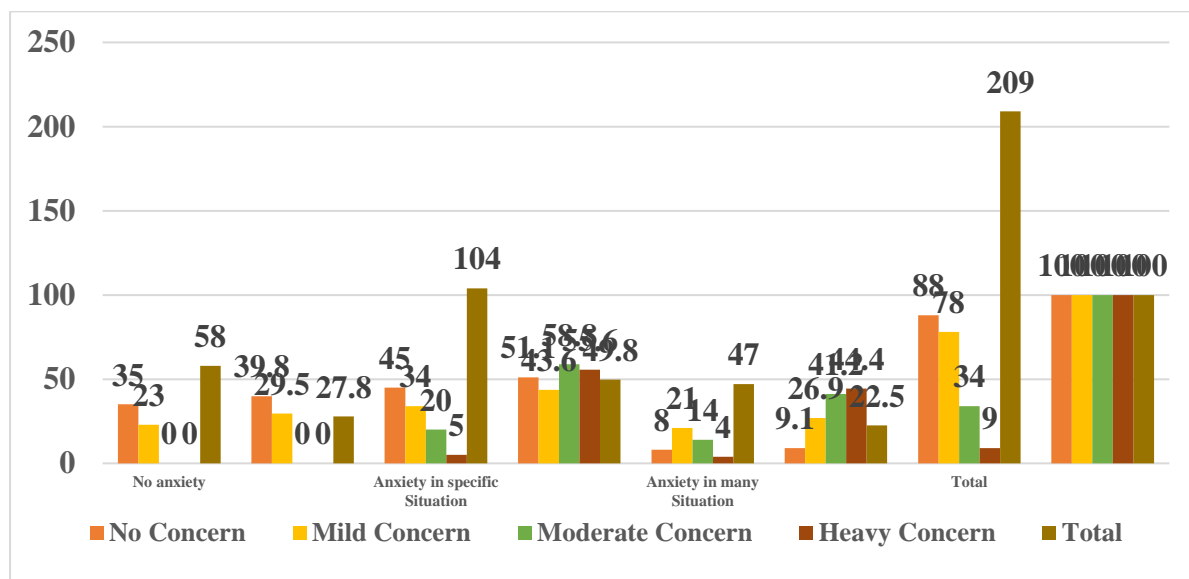
Body Image	Social anxiety			
	No anxiety at all	Anxiety in specific Situation	Anxiety in many Situations	Total

	N	%	N	%	n	%	N	%
<b>No Concern</b>	35	39.8	45	51.1	8	9.1	88	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Mild Concern</b>	23	29.5	34	43.6	21	26.9	78	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Moderate Concern</b>	0	0.0	20	58.8	14	41.2	34	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Heavy Concern</b>	0	0.0	5	55.6	4	44.4	9	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Total</b>	58	27.8	104	49.8	47	22.5	209	<b>100.0</b>

$\chi^2 = 32.76$  d.f. = 6  $p < 0.001$

Spearman Correlation ( $r_s$ ) = +.374  $p < 0.01^{**}$

\*\*p<0.01 shows high statistical significance



**Figure No. 4 The association between Body image and Social Anxiety**

The above table and graph show the association between body image and social anxiety among subjects with mild concern regarding body image claim to have no anxiety in any situation. Most people report feeling anxious in a specific situation. This implies a strong association between heightened social anxiety and mild body image concern. Like the group with moderate anxiety, none of the people who have serious body image issues said they do not feel anxious. The majority said they get anxious in specific situations, while very few individuals said they are anxious in many situations. This suggests a strong correlation between heavy body image issues and higher social anxiety. A noteworthy portion of people with moderate body image



concerns experience anxiety frequently or in many situations, and their distribution among anxiety categories was wider. This suggests that compared to people who have no concerns, those who have mild body image concerns may be more likely to experience anxiety in general. People who do not care about how they seem on their bodies are more prone to get anxious in some circumstances as opposed to various circumstances. A lower proportion of this group says they are anxious in many situations. This implies that lower overall levels of social anxiety are linked to a lack of body image concerns.

The results of the chi-square test indicate a strong correlation between the social anxiety categories and the degree of body image concern. There is a statistically significant link between the degrees of social anxiety and body image concern with a p-value less than 0.001. Social anxiety and body image concerns are significantly positively correlated, as indicated by the Spearman correlation coefficient of +0.374. This implies that social anxiety tends to rise in tandem with concerns about body image. According to the significance level ( $p < 0.01$ ), there is statistical significance in the relationship mentioned above. The data demonstrates a strong positive correlation between social anxiety and body image concerns.

Similarly, in a study conducted by **Dixit & Luqman, 2018**, Body image concerns were found to be significantly correlated with psychological distress and social anxiety, respectively. Social anxiety seems to rise in tandem with body image concerns as they go from being insignificant to highly significant. Higher levels of body image concern are analogous with an increased risk of social anxiety, which may hurt an individual's ability to connect with others and their general well-being. Taking care of issues related to body image could help with social anxiety management. The results point to the need for more studies to identify the processes behind the relationship between social anxiety and body image difficulties and to create focused interventions that deal with both problems at the same time. Another study found to be positive correlations between social anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and body image dissatisfaction. Fear of negative evaluation also acted as a mediator in the relationship between body image dissatisfaction and social anxiety (**Pawijit et al., 2019**).

## **Conclusion**

Body image concern is intricate and multidimensional, interacting with society, the media, and personal experiences, it involves a complex interplay of perception, emotion, and cognition, and impacts self-esteem, social interactions, and overall well-being. In contrast, social anxiety is more than just feeling nervous, it significantly impacts an individual's daily life. It is a

complex problem that is impacted by peer relationships, body image, stressors, and personality traits, as well as cultural background and prior experiences. The study highly recommended professional assistance, such as counselling or cognitive-behavioural therapy, which can ameliorate anyone struggling with these issues. It is within our collective power as a society to support and foster the mental health of every individual. Interventions at the individual and systemic levels have become increasingly important. Remember that taking care of issues related to body image and social anxiety can have a commending effect on a person's general well-being and interpersonal relationships. Collectively, the current research highlights how crucial it is to take social anxiety and body image into account when developing mental health therapies.

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