



## **THE IMPACT OF SHYNESS ON PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT AND SOCIAL INTERACTION ANXIETY IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Keywords:</b> Shyness, Perceived Social Support, Social Interaction Anxiety</p> <p><b>Corresponding Author:</b> <b>Syed Naqi Imam,</b> The University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir</p>	<p>This research examined the interrelationships between shyness, perceived social support, and social interaction anxiety among university students, taking into account demographic factors such as age, gender, education level, family dynamics, socioeconomic status, marital status, and parental occupation. A total of 300 students from various departments at the University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir participated in the study. The Shyness Questionnaire, Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, and Social Interaction Anxiety Scale were used to assess the variables of interest. Data analysis using SPSS software revealed significant correlations, including a positive correlation between shyness and social interaction anxiety, and negative correlations between shyness and perceived social support, as well as social interaction anxiety and perceived social support. These findings provide insights into the complex relationships between shyness, social support, and social anxiety in university students.</p>

### **INTRODUCTION**

Shyness is a complex psychological trait marked by feelings of apprehension, self-consciousness, and discomfort in social situations. This can lead to avoidance or withdrawal from interpersonal interactions, often resulting in reluctance to engage in conversations, make eye contact, or initiate contact with unfamiliar individuals (Crozier, 2001). Shyness exists on a spectrum that ranges from mild and temporary to severe and chronic social anxiety (Carducci, 2009).

Shyness is a universal fear that transcends cultural boundaries, causing inhibition and hindering the development of healthy interpersonal relationships and professional goals (Henderson, Zimbardo, & Carducci, 2001). Metaphorically, shyness can be

viewed as a retreat from life, which weakens human connections and potential (Henderson & Zimbardo, 2010).

Shyness can be broadly categorized into two types: situational shyness and dispositional shyness. Situational shyness refers to feelings of discomfort in specific contexts rather than being a pervasive personality trait (Crozier, 2001). In contrast, dispositional shyness is a stable and enduring trait characterized by a tendency to experience stress and self-consciousness in social situations (Cheek & Melchior, 1990). Known as trait shyness, dispositional shyness can have far-reaching implications. Shy individuals often face challenges in forming and maintaining friendships, expressing themselves, and developing close relationships (Jones, Briggs, & Smith, 2018). Shyness can also hinder romantic relationships, as shy individuals may struggle to approach potential partners or express their feelings (Coplan & Bowker, 2019). Additionally, shy individuals tend to have smaller social support networks, which can lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation (Rubin, Nelson, Hastings, & Asendorpf, 1999). In professional settings, shyness can impede career advancement, as shy individuals may find it difficult to navigate job interviews and networking opportunities (Carducci, 2012). Shyness is linked to various psychological concerns, including heightened anxiety and depressive symptoms (Henderson, Zimbardo, & Cross, 2018). Those who experience shyness often struggle with lower self-confidence and self-esteem (Crozier, 2005). Furthermore, shyness is a risk factor for developing mental health conditions, such as social anxiety disorder (Beidel & Turner, 1998). The development of shyness is influenced by a combination of genetic, environmental, and psychological factors. Research indicates that genetic predispositions, particularly those related to neurotransmitter systems like serotonin, contribute to shyness and social anxiety (Schmitz et al., 2016).

Perceived social support, which refers to an individual's perception of the availability and adequacy of support from their social network, plays a crucial role in maintaining psychological well-being, physical health, and overall quality of life (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Studies show that higher levels of perceived social support are associated with numerous benefits, including reduced mental distress, anxiety, and depression. Improved physical health outcomes, such as a lower risk of chronic diseases and mortality rates (Uchino, 2009). Enhanced life satisfaction and subjective well-being (Diener & Seligman, 2002). Increased resilience and coping abilities in the face of stressful life events (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Perceived social support encompasses the perceived availability and adequacy of emotional and instrumental support provided by an individual's social network, including friends, family, and significant others (Zimet, Dahlem, & Farley, 1988). A substantial body of research has consistently demonstrated that higher levels of perceived social support correlate with improved mental and physical health outcomes, including a reduced risk of mortality (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010).

Social interaction anxiety is characterized by a deep-seated fear of being judged, evaluated, or scrutinized by others in social situations, often stemming from concerns about rejection, embarrassment, or negative evaluation (Alden & Taylor, 2004). This common anxiety disorder can significantly impair an individual's ability to engage with others and participate in social activities. The cognitive manifestations of social interaction anxiety include negative self-referential thoughts and beliefs, such as catastrophic expectations of embarrassment or rejection. Behavioral consequences may include avoidance of social situations or reliance on safety behaviors—like fidgeting or social withdrawal—to mitigate the risk of negative evaluation (Hofmann & Bartolo, 2016). Chronic social interaction anxiety can lead to difficulties in forming

and maintaining meaningful relationships, both personal and professional, ultimately contributing to feelings of isolation and loneliness (Alden & Taylor, 2010).

Social interaction anxiety can cause significant emotional distress, including feelings of embarrassment, self-consciousness, and shame, often stemming from social situations.

### **Rationale of The Study**

Shyness is defined by a profound fear of social rejection, humiliation, or disapproval, which can significantly hinder an individual's ability to engage in social interactions. This personality trait is closely linked to social anxiety, highlighting the need to examine the relationship between shyness and anxiety in social situations. By exploring this connection, researchers can gain valuable insights into how personality traits influence social behavior.

Social interaction anxiety is a prevalent issue that affects many individuals, limiting their ability to navigate social situations effectively. Understanding the factors that contribute to social interaction anxiety is essential for developing targeted interventions. Social support plays a crucial role in emotional well-being and coping strategies, and investigating its influence can reveal whether a strong support network can help alleviate social interaction anxiety.

This study aims to investigate the impact of shyness on perceived social support and social interaction anxiety among university students. Given the limited research on this specific topic, the study seeks to fill a knowledge gap and offer new insights. Its significance lies in the potential to clarify the complex interplay between shyness, perceived social support, and social interaction anxiety.

Research has consistently shown that perceived social support is associated with lower levels of social interaction anxiety and shyness. When individuals feel they have a supportive network, they typically experience reduced anxiety and shyness during social interactions. Such a supportive environment can enhance self-esteem, foster a sense of belonging, and provide reassurance, ultimately improving comfort and confidence in social situations. Shyness can lead to social interaction anxiety, resulting in difficulties during social engagements and potentially causing feelings of isolation, diminished self-esteem, and missed opportunities for both personal and professional growth. If not addressed, social anxiety can hinder the development of strong relationships and essential social skills. University students are an ideal population for this study due to the dynamic and transitional nature of the university environment. Students frequently face significant challenges and changes that can impact their social interactions, self-esteem, and stress levels. By examining the interrelationships among shyness, perceived social support, and social interaction anxiety in this group, the study aims to generate new insights and practical implications for individuals struggling with social anxiety.

Ultimately, this research has the potential to inform the creation of targeted interventions aimed at reducing social interaction anxiety and shyness. By clarifying the complex interactions between these variables, the study can empower students to seize opportunities they might otherwise miss.

### **Objectives**

1. Explore the relationship between shyness and its impact on social interaction, anxiety, and perceived social support, shedding light on the complex dynamics between these variables.
2. Investigate the effects of various demographic factors, including age, gender, education level, family structure, socioeconomic status, marital status, parental

occupation, academic achievement, monthly income, and place of residence, on shyness, perceived social support, and social interaction anxiety.

### **Hypotheses**

1. A negative relationship is expected between shyness and perceived social support, suggesting that individuals who experience higher levels of shyness tend to perceive lower levels of social support.
2. A positive correlation is anticipated between shyness and social interaction anxiety, indicating that shy individuals are more likely to experience anxiety in social situations.
3. A negative relationship is predicted between social interaction anxiety and perceived social support, implying that individuals who experience higher levels of social interaction anxiety tend to perceive lower levels of social support.
4. It is hypothesized that female students will exhibit higher levels of shyness, lower levels of perceived social support, and greater social interaction anxiety compared to their male counterparts.

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Instruments**

#### **SHYNESS QUESTIONNAIRE**

To assess shyness tendencies among students, the Henderson and Zimbardo Shyness Questionnaire was used (2002). This 35-item self-report measure employs a 5-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from "not at all characteristic of me" to "extremely characteristic of me." Notably, four items (10, 29, 30, and 35) were reverse-scored to ensure an accurate assessment. Higher total scores on the questionnaire indicate greater levels of temperamental shyness, with possible scores ranging from 35 to 175. The scale has demonstrated high internal consistency reliability, with a reported Cronbach's alpha of 0.92 in previous research (Sheldon, 2013) and 0.84 in the present study.

#### **PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT QUESTIONNAIRE**

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), developed by Zimet et al. in 1988, was used to evaluate students' perceptions of social support from three distinct sources: family, friends, and significant others. This measure employs a 5-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." While the MSPSS was originally composed of 24 items, the final version includes 12 items that effectively address relationships with family, friends, and significant others. The MSPSS has consistently demonstrated strong psychometric properties, including excellent internal consistency and test-retest reliability. In non-clinical samples, Cronbach's alpha values range from 0.81 to 0.98, and in clinical populations, they range from 0.92 to 0.94.

#### **SOCIAL INTERACTION ANXIETY QUESTIONNAIRE**

The Social Anxiety Questionnaire for Adults-Short Form (SAQ-A30; Caballo et al., 2012) was used to assess social interaction anxiety. This questionnaire is based on the original 72-item Social Anxiety Questionnaire for Adults (SAQ-AR; Caballo et al., 2010) but includes the most relevant social situations. An exploratory factor analysis identified five distinct factors related to social interaction anxiety: public speaking, interactions with the opposite sex, assertive expression of annoyance, interactions with strangers, and fear of criticism and embarrassment. The final 30-item questionnaire demonstrated excellent psychometric properties, including a high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.93) and strong convergent validity.

## Research Design

This study used a cross-sectional research design, utilizing a quantitative approach to collect data.

## Sample

A convenient sample of 300 students was selected from the University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir in Muzaffarabad. This sample consisted of 150 males and 150 females, with participants aged between 19 and 27 years. The students were enrolled in either master's or BS programs across various departments.

## Procedure

After obtaining permission from the relevant authorities, we approached university students and secured their informed consent. Participants were guaranteed that the information collected would be used only for research purposes. They were also encouraged to provide honest responses to the questions.

## Results

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Study Sample (N = 300)**

variables		frequency	percentage
Age of Respondents	19-23	186	62.0
	23-27	114	38.0
Gender of Respondents	Male	150	50
	Female	150	50
Education Level of Respondents	Undergraduates	236	78.7
	Masters	64	21.3
Marks Achieved in Last Class	60%-70%	34	11.3
	70%-80%	147	49.0
	80%-90%	119	39.7
Family System of Respondents	Nuclear	138	46.0
	Joint	162	54.0
Socio economic Status of Respondents	Upper class	29	9.7
	Middle class	243	81.0
	Lower class	28	9.3
Marital Status of Respondents	Married	76	25.3
	Unmarried	224	74.7
Father Occupation of Respondents	Government employ	102	34.0
	Businessman	198	66.0
Mother Occupation of Respondents	House wife	250	83.3
	Businesswoman	38	12.7
	Government employ	12	4.0
Monthly Income of Respondents	20000-40000	5	1.7
	40000-60000	92	30.7
	Above 60000	203	67.7
Residence of Respondents	Urban area	161	53.7
	Rural area	139	46.3

A statistical analysis was conducted based on data collected from a sample of 300 university students (150 males and 150 females) from the University of Muzaffarabad, AJK. The demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in the table, which reveals that the students' ages ranged from 19 to 27 years. The sample comprised students from both urban and rural areas, with varying family systems (joint or nuclear) and education levels (undergraduate and master's). The students' academic performance was diverse, with marks achieved in their last class ranging from 60% to 90%. The sample also represented a range of socioeconomic statuses (lower, middle, and upper class), marital statuses (married and unmarried), and parental occupations (government employee, businessman, housewife, and businesswoman). Furthermore, the monthly income of the students' families varied, with categories including 20,000, 40,000, 60,000, and above.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Analysis of Study Measures (N = 300)**

<i>SCALE</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i><math>\alpha</math></i>	<i>Range</i>	
					<i>MAX</i>	<i>MIN</i>
SQ	300	91.19	28.48	.95	131.00	48.00
MSPSS	300	55.97	19.53	.95	84.00	26.00
SIAS	300	36.87	22.36	.97	68.00	8.00

Reliability is a crucial aspect of instrument validation, as it ensures that the results obtained are stable and consistent. In quantitative research, Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) coefficient is a widely accepted criterion for evaluating reliability. The results presented in Table 2 reveal that the reliability coefficients for the Shyness Questionnaire (SQ), Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), and Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS) are 0.95, 0.95, and 0.97, respectively. These coefficients indicate excellent reliability for all three scales, suggesting that the instruments are consistent and trustworthy measures of the constructs they purport to assess.

**Table 3: Correlational Analysis of Study Variables (N = 300)**

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1: SQ	-	-.845**	.886**	.246**	.846**
2: MSPSS		-	-.843**	-.442**	-.760**
3: SIAS			-	.311**	.899**

The results of the Pearson Correlation analysis, presented in Table 3, reveal significant relationships between the study variables. Specifically, the Shyness Questionnaire (SQ) exhibits a negative correlation with the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), indicating that higher levels of shyness are associated with lower levels of perceived social support. In contrast, SQ shows a positive correlation with the Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS), signifying that increased shyness is linked to greater social interaction anxiety. Furthermore, MSPSS is negatively correlated with both SQ and SIAS, highlighting the inverse relationship between perceived social support and shyness/social interaction anxiety. Overall, the results indicate strong and significant positive and negative correlations between the

variables, providing insight into the complex relationships between shyness, social support, and social interaction anxiety.

**Table 4:** *Gender Differences in Shyness, Perceived Social Support, and Social Interaction Anxiety: t-test and Descriptive Statistics Results (N = 300)*

Variable	Males (N=150)		Females (N=150)		T	df	P	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD				
SQ	90.28	30.37	92.10	26.50	.66	298	0.00	0.06
MSPSS	57.56	21.88	54.38	16.82	-1.25	298	0.00	0.16
SIAS	34.96	19.58	38.66	24.74	1.436	298	0.00	0.16

$p < 0.05$  The results of the independent t-test analysis, presented in Table 4, reveal significant gender differences in the scores of the Shyness Questionnaire (SQ), Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), and Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS). The analysis indicates that females be likely to exhibit greater levels of shyness relative to males, as evidenced by their slightly higher scores on the SQ. Conversely, males scored slightly higher on the MSPSS, suggesting that they perceive greater levels of social support compared to females. Furthermore, females demonstrated slightly greater scores on the SIAS, indicating greater social interaction anxiety compared to males. These findings highlight the existence of statistically significant gender differences in shyness, perceived social support, and social interaction anxiety.

**Table 5: Multiple Regression Analysis of Predictors of Perceived Social Support (N = 300)**

Variables	Model 1 B	B	MSPSS	
			Model 2 (95%CL)	
			LL	UL
Constant	5.43**	-2.78	-4.08	1.68
Age	-10.55	-.26	-.93	.46
Gender	.05	-.04	-.64	.49
Education level	-.58**	.17	-.83	.42
Marks achieved in last class	1.49**	8.42	.00	.00
Family system	1.32**	7.43	.01	.01
Socio-economic status	-.68	-.18	-.63	.45
Marital status	.72**	-.15	-.52	.55
Father occupation	1.22**	7.83	.00	.05
Mother occupation	.62**	.17	.02	.02
Income	.08	-.07	-.52	.38
Residence	.04	-.09	-.42	.28
SQ		-.62**	.25	.14
SIAS		-.20**	.14	.25
R <sup>2</sup>	.07	.50		

$\Delta R^2$		0.25		
F	5.06	11.42		
$\Delta F$		8.42		

Note:  $R^2 = 0.50$  ,  $\Delta R^2 = 0.25$  ,  $F = 11.42$  ,  $\Delta F = 8.42$

Table 5 shows the results of the multiple linear regression analysis, including the unstandardized coefficients and confidence intervals. In Model 1, the effects of demographic variables (age, gender, education level, academic achievement, family system, socioeconomic status, marital status, parental occupation, income, and residence) were controlled. The results revealed that, after accounting for demographic factors, shyness (SQ) and social interaction anxiety (SIAS) emerged as significant negative predictors of perceived social support in Model 2. This reveals that greater levels of shyness and social interaction anxiety are linked with lesser levels of perceived social support. The R-squared value ( $R^2 = 0.50$ ) suggests that 50% of the variation in perceived social support can be defined by the predictor variables, specifically shyness and social interaction anxiety. Notably, Model 2 explains an increased 25% of the variation in perceived social support, highlighting the importance of shyness and social interaction anxiety in predicting perceived social support.

## DISCUSSION

This study investigated the interconnections between shyness, perceived social support, and social interaction anxiety, yielding findings that corroborated all four hypotheses. Specifically, the first hypothesis posited that shyness would exhibit a negative relationship with perceived social support. In line with earlier research (Jonier & Thomas, 1997), the findings revealed a significant negative correlation between shyness and perceived social support, suggesting that the more the individuals feel shy the lesser they perceive social support from the society.

The second hypothesis gave prediction that there is a positive correlation between shyness and social interaction anxiety. The results upheld this hypothesis, aligning with previous studies. For instance, Henderson and Zimbardo (2001) discovered that shy individuals tend to experience elevated social anxiety and avoid social interactions. Furthermore, Schmidt and Buss (2010) identified a positive relationship between childhood shyness and social anxiety, providing additional support for the link between these constructs.

The third hypothesis predicted that social interaction anxiety would exhibit a negative relationship with perceived social support. The results confirmed our hypothesis, echoing the findings of Mann and Himelein (2001). Their research indicated that individuals struggling with social interaction anxiety commonly confront challenges in making and sustaining social bonds, ultimately contributing to increased sense of loneliness and decreased perceptions of social support.

The fourth hypothesis predicted that females would exhibit upper levels of shyness, lower perceived social support, and greater social interaction anxiety compared to male students. The results upheld this hypothesis, aligning with Carducci et al.'s (2000) findings that women showed more shyness and social anxiety than men. In contrast, prior research also suggests that men may have an advantage in terms of social network size (Stansfeld et al., 1999) and may report good level of social support in specific contexts (Olson & Shultz, 1994). The current study's findings contribute to a deeper comprehension of the intricate connection between shyness, perceived social support, and social interaction anxiety, highlighting the need for further exploration of these complex dynamics.



## CONCLUSION

This study has made a vital contribution to our comprehension of the intricate relationships between shyness, perceived social support, and social interaction anxiety among university students. The findings underscore the profound effects of shyness on students' perceptions of social support and their experiences of social anxiety. By bringing to light on these complex interactions, current study gives meaningful awareness into the social and emotional challenges encountered by shy university students. Ultimately, current study aids in developing specific strategies to promote social and emotional well-being of these students.

To deepen our awareness of the complicated relationship between shyness, social support, and social interaction anxiety, we recommend the following avenues for future research:

**Investigating Mechanisms and Interventions:** In-depth studies can uncover the specific mechanisms underlying the connection between shyness, social support, and social interaction anxiety. This knowledge can inform the development of targeted interventions to address these issues. **Diversifying Sampling:** Future research can benefit from collecting data from universities across various regions, utilizing a larger and more diverse sample size. This approach can be very helpful in understanding how shyness affects perceived social support and social interaction anxiety, while also exploring the mediating roles of perceived stress and fear of failure.

## LIMITATIONS

The study has notable limitations that should not be overlooked. First of all, the cross-sectional design provides only a static view of the relationships between shyness, perceived social support, and social interaction anxiety, precluding any causal inferences. Furthermore, participants may have been affected by social pressures that can lead to biasness in their responses, maybe resulting in underreported shyness and overreported perceived social support. The study's generalizability is also restricted, as it was conducted within a single university and region, which may have unique cultural and environmental factors that impacted the results. To tackle these drawbacks, future researches may benefit from using longitudinal designs, utilize more objective measures, and conduct studies in diverse settings to enhance generalizability. By doing so, we can develop a more detailed understanding of the effects of shyness on the mental health of university students.

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