

## Social anxiety and self-efficacy as the indices of assertiveness

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The present paper throws light upon those aspects of a human-being, which if handled carefully can lead one to a more fulfilling, conducive and wholesome life. Assertiveness is one such survival skill, which, if taught and instilled at the right time and in the right manner can save many from rating their lives as unfulfilling. Assertiveness teaches one to respect oneself and respecting others at the same time. It teaches one towards increased awareness of personal rights and paying attention to one's verbal as well as non-verbal skills also. At the same time, not violating the rights of others is the other side of an assertive individual. Social Anxiety and Self-efficacy are two such variables, which are directly related to Assertiveness, the former negatively and the latter positively. High Social Anxiety and Low Self Efficacy are two such obstacles, which can put hindrance in the growth of an individual in a multidimensional way-Emotionally, Behaviourally and Socially.

Keywords: assertiveness, social anxiety, self-efficacy

The state of not being able to express one's feelings or not being able to behave the way one wants in a social set-up may be absolutely awful. Out of the plethora of reasons of this state of mind, one significant problem is lack of assertiveness. Lack of assertiveness becomes a problem when building a relationship, going out in the career world, making requests, saying 'no' when you don't want to say 'yes'. Assertiveness refers to standing for one's rights without stepping on to someone else's rights. Assertive behavior is all about expressing needs, feelings and preferences in a manner that is neither threatening nor punishing to other people.

Assertiveness requires a person to attempt to ensure his/her rights or to actualize an internalized view of self through interaction with others (Morokoff et al., 2002). Being sure of oneself is additional characteristic of an assertive individual (Twenge, 2006). Clearly expressing yourself to other, persisting with your goals in the face of opposition and appropriately standing up for yourself in the midst of conflict or criticism is what assertiveness is....

Forman (1993) defines assertive behaviour as the midpoint of a continuum of behavioural styles ranging from passive behaviour to aggressive behaviour.

- Nonassertive behaviour is characterized by its overly "nice" and submissive quality as the individual engaging in passive behaviour is typically afraid of conflict and overly afraid of social rejection. The nonassertive individual frequently holds the belief that if you behave "nicely enough" to somebody who is acting rudely, obnoxiously or is pushy towards you, that the rude person will eventually understand how "good" you are and gratefully stop acting in a rude, obnoxious or overly demanding manner.
- Aggressive behaviour: Stating your position in a dominating humiliating way. Aggression doesn't take into account the other person's feelings or rights. It is an attack on the other person.
- Assertive behaviour: An assertive individual maintains that he or she is the ultimate judge of his/her own behaviour although other people are free to have their own opinions and approve or disapprove as they fit. An assertive person stands up for his or her tastes, desires, values and opinions while respecting other people's freedom to have their own individual difference on these

things. A person who behaves assertively understands that he or she is naturally incompatible with certain other people, therefore social rejection is simply an acknowledgment of social incompatibility with a given person and not a reflection of their worth as a person.

### *Social anxiety*

An umbrella term that denotes the experience of discomfort in relation to social interaction and something that differs from generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder and obsessive compulsive disorder is Social Anxiety (Schlenker & Leary, 1982). Social anxiety is a fear which is based on performance and interactive dynamics that comprises emotional, behavioural, physiological and thinking process. Social anxiety involves the fear of being negatively evaluated by others in various situations like interaction, facing audience, stage fright, speech anxiety, heterosexual social anxiety etc. Socially anxious people tend to avoid their emotions as a safety behavior to prevent the possible display of undesirable feelings to others, which may invite social blunders, embarrassment and rejection. The defining characteristic of social anxiety is that unlike other anxieties, social anxiety arises from the prospect or presence of interpersonal interaction in real or imagined social settings (Schlenker and Leary, 1982).

### *Theories of social anxiety*

*Self-Presentation Theory* (Leary & Kowalski, 1995a, 1995b; Schlenker & Leary, 1982): The self-presentational theory of social anxiety proposes that people experience social anxiety when they are motivated to make a desired impression on other people but doubt that they will successfully do so or not.

*Sociometer Theory* (Baumeister & Leary, 1995): Relational devaluation occurs when an individual perceives that one or more other people do not regard their relationship with the individual to be as important, close, or valuable as he or she desires, Put differently, people feel socially anxious when they believe that the impressions they make will not lead others to value their relationship with them as much as they desire, and particularly if those impressions may lead others to actually devalue, avoid, or reject them e.g. the job applicant in the interview, the performer on stage.

### Self-efficacy

Among the mechanisms of human agency, none is more central or pervasive than the beliefs of personal efficacy. This core belief is the foundation of human motivation, well-being and accomplishments. Bandura (1978) defined self-efficacy as “a judgement of one's ability to execute a particular behavior pattern”. Wood and Bandura (1989) expanded on this definition by suggesting that self efficacy beliefs form a central role in the regulatory process through which an individual's motivation and performance attainments are governed. The construct of self-efficacy is a part of a broad literature which has developed around the issues of human agency, mastery and control. Its more delimited form is one's perceptions and assessments of self with regard to competence, effectiveness and causal agency. Self efficacy has a unique importance in social psychological research because of its ability to bring out favourable consequences in the areas of physical and mental health. Smith and Betz (2002) have applied Bandura's theoretical model to social situations and have developed a psychological construct called social self efficacy.

Social Self-efficacy is defined as an individual's confidence in his/her ability to engage in social interactional tasks necessary to initiate and maintain interpersonal relationships (Smith & Betz, 2002).

Self-efficacy is an all encompassing construct, which, if handled carefully and is nurtured in an individual, can make social life more fulfilling and effective. Assertiveness is one such survival skill which can help an individual going more than half way through in overcoming the social, emotional and interpersonal demands as Assertiveness puts an individual in a 'win-win' situation and the person is able to come out as an enhanced person as he/she is not socially anxious, has efficacy beliefs about the social situations.

### Objectives of the study

- To study the relationship between assertiveness and social anxiety.
- To study the relationship between assertiveness and self-efficacy.

### Hypotheses of the study

- Assertiveness and social anxiety will be negatively related.
- Assertiveness and self-efficacy will be positively related.

## Method

### Participants

The sample comprises of 100 adolescent females with an age-range of 13-15 years selected from private schools of Patiala District.

### Instruments

**Assertiveness:** To assess Assertiveness, Rathus Assertiveness Schedule is being used (RAS,1973). It is a 30 item, 6 point Likert Type scale. Each item depicts a situation wherein one needs to behave in appropriate assertive manner. The score ranges from -90 to +90 but for the sake of statistical calculation, a constant of 100 is added to each raw score.

**Social Anxiety:** The Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS,1987) is a self-report measure of Social Anxiety. It is a 24 item, 4 point likert type scale. Each item depicts a different social situation. The items are divided into two sub scales, social interaction and performance situations. For each situation, the person rates their level of fear(where 0 indicates no fear and 3 indicates sever fear) and

avoidance (0 indicates they never avoid a particular situation and 3 indicates they usually avoid situation). Here, avoidance score is being considered.

**Self-efficacy:** Perceived Social Self Efficacy Scale by Smith & Betz (PSSE Scale, 2002) is being used. It is a 25 item, 5 point Likert Scale. Higher the score, higher the perceived social self efficacy.

### Research Design

- Descriptive statistics and correlation are used.

## Results

Table 1 : Means, SDs and r values of Assertiveness , Social Anxiety and Self-Efficacy Scores

Variables	Mean	SD	r
Assertiveness	115.84	9.46	
Social Anxiety	29.16	2.52	-.22*
Self Efficacy	90.63	9.15	.20*

P<.05

## Discussion

The present paper was designed to examine the relationship of Assertiveness with Social Anxiety and Self-efficacy. First, it was hypothesized that Assertiveness and Social Anxiety will be negatively related. Results (Table 1) revealed that Assertiveness is found to be significantly negatively correlated with Social Anxiety. It clearly means that an assertive person will not be socially anxious but a non-assertive person will be. As a socially anxious person is afraid of social situations that involve interaction with other people for the fear of being negatively evaluated by others, it becomes difficult for him/her to speak up or assert oneself because of the fear of rejection. This fear is caused by the concerns of embarrassment, humiliation or negative evaluations by others (Luterek, 2006). Social Anxiety includes both fear and rejection (Balon, 2007). The behavior of socially anxious people is non-assertive and their primary goal is to avoid rejection at all costs and maintain some degree of connectedness with others (Clark & Wells, 1995). Lesure-Lester (2001) corroborate the present findings that assertiveness and social anxiety are negatively related.

Further, it was also hypothesized that Assertiveness and Self-Efficacy would be positively related. Results (Table 1) reveal that Assertiveness and Self Efficacy have a significant direct relationship, which means that an assertive person would be an efficacious person and vice-versa. Specifically speaking, social self efficacy has been suggested to impact various domains of an individual's life experiences such as social adjustment (Ferrari & Parker, 1992; Smith & Betz, 2002). Gini, Alberio, Benelli and Altoe (2007) found that high social self efficacy results in assertively handling social environments whereas low social self efficacy is highly related to a timid and a reserve way of handling social environments. Efficacy beliefs affect whether individuals think in self enhancing or self debilitating ways.

A host of variables influence when, why and how one will act in a social situation. In an ever changing social world, asserting oneself, not feeling anxious and feeling efficacious will stay unchanged so far as desired behavior is concerned. Assertiveness will play a central role so far as perceiving oneself is concerned as an individual will be more confident of oneself and will not be afraid of any social

situation and important to remember is that such a person considers others' self respect to be as important as his own. An efficacious, non-anxious assertive being is an asset to the family, to society, to country.

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