

Short Communication

EXPLORING SHYNESS AND SOCIAL INTERACTION IN WOMEN: A MIXED-METHODS STUDY

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Abstract

Shyness has been classified as a dispositional trait by Cheek et al. and has developed into a concept of individuals remaining hesitant and developing anxiety when forced to socialise. People with extreme levels of shyness appear uncomfortable and demonstrate both physical symptoms like blushing and stammering and psychological symptoms like feeling inferior. Over time, shyness developed from a classification of personality trait to illness that had a negative impact on the social life of an individual. *ASEAN Journal of Psychiatry, Vol. 23(1) January, 2022; 1-4.*

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Introduction

Shyness has been classified as a dispositional trait by Cheek et al. and has developed into a concept of individuals remaining hesitant and developing anxiety when forced to socialise. People with extreme levels of shyness appear uncomfortable and demonstrate both physical symptoms like blushing and stammering and psychological symptoms like feeling inferior. Over time, shyness developed from a classification of personality trait to illness that had a negative impact on the social life of an individual [1].

Since social connections are a vital element of an individual's life, studies that investigated shyness and social connectivity/interaction explained how shyness ranged between mild- social-avoidant behaviour to inhibitory social phobia. Consecutively systematic reviews have shown that shyness has been a mediating factor in negatively influencing social connectivity by causing high levels of loneliness, depression (and interpersonal difficulties [2].

In support to the research mentioned above, shyness has shown to affect women more than men. Additionally, it has shown to increase

loneliness, anxiety and negatively impact women in their fashion choices. Similarly, research has also demonstrated how shyness leads to a decrease in social connectivity and social interaction. However, these studies focused on both men and women and have not ideally been studied on women. These discrepancies in literature are indicative of how these tendencies need to be studied in detail, particularly on women since shyness has shown to have a negative impact on the general lifestyle for individuals [3,4].

Collective evidence suggests that there are limited qualitative studies on shyness and aspects of social interaction these studies have individually focused on either shyness or social interaction, but these concepts have not been studied together [5].

Therefore, this study hypothesises that shyness will negatively predict social connectedness in young female adults in the United Arab Emirates [6]. To ensure that the subjective perspective of shy women is captured, the study will utilise a mixed-methods approach to explore experiences and challenges of shy women. The triangulation of the data will result in obtaining a well-

balanced perspective and bridge ideological gaps [7].

Materials and Methods

Design

A concurrent mixed-methods design with a dominant priority for qualitative process was formulated using a QUANT+QUAL model. Standardised questionnaires and an open-ended questionnaire were utilised. In the quantitative part, the predictive variable was shyness and, the outcome variable was social connectedness. Qualitative data was elucidated from the open-ended questionnaire. Triangulation of data allows the research to be viewed in different perspectives, enabling researchers to identify patterns and verify a hypothesis. The quantitative component ensured that factors like mood and memory reconstruction does not impact the self-perception and recollection of shy individuals and will numerically signify shyness. The qualitative data will help in understanding the hypothesised relationship further [8].

Materials

This study used Shyness Scale (SS) and Social Connectedness Scale and an Open-Ended Questionnaire to obtain subjective perspectives of shy women.

Participants

The sample consisted of 98 young female adults, who were recruited *via* a convenience sampling technique from Middlesex University, public locations, and through mutual contacts who had received second-hand information regarding the research.

Procedure

All the three questionnaires were handed out to participants along with information sheet and consent form. After participation, participants were thanked for their time and debriefing sheets were given.

Data analysis

For Quantitative data analysis, a Linear Regression was administered to understand if shyness predicted social connectedness. For the qualitative analysis, participants comprised of the initial sample and were selected through purposive sequential sampling. The Shyness Scale was used as a screening tool to obtain shy females. Out of twenty-five participants who scored the highest shyness score, nine were selected for thematic analysis and their responses on the open-ended questionnaires were analysed [9,10].

Results

The quantitative aspect analysed through a regression analysis indicated that shyness significantly and negatively accounted for 11% of social interaction in females (Adjusted R²=0.11).

The qualitative analysis through thematic analysis revealed that shyness impacted participants' identity, fashion choices, social cognitions concerning their environment, and their interactions on social media.

The three main themes that emerged were identity as a shy individual ("I get very scared whenever I get picked on and tend to stutter and blackout"-ID 10), social cognition ("I do feel a sense of disconnect occasionally, most of the time it is because of the environment"-ID 8), and virtual life ("I prefer being anonymous and invisible and use social media to chat with my very close friends"-ID 3).

Discussion

The result obtained was in accordance with previous research that reported a significant correlation between the two variables [11,12]. The qualitative findings converged with the quantitative results and provided additional empirical evidence that shyness in women indeed impacted social connectivity and, in some cases, limited social interaction eventually leading to socially isolating behaviours [13]. Shy females expressively described the various problems they encountered during social interactions. Essentially their responses indicated that shy

individuals were stuck in a cycle of negative thoughts of being judged and perceived in a certain way by the society that led them to adopt a certain mind-set which subsequently led to personal dissatisfaction, limited social interaction, and eventually an increase in social isolation. The crux of this cycle represents a theoretical implication of Reciprocal Determinism [14,15].

Conclusion

This study concludes how a shy mind-set impacts social cognition and social interaction, negatively in individuals and therefore the study ultimately serves as an empirical link towards understanding the perspectives of shy young women and the relationship they harbour with the social world. The findings of this study can further be used as a basis to investigate initiation of motivational groups and support groups that support women. While this study focused on experiences of shyness in women, it is perhaps possible to generalise these findings to males as well.

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