

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

**THE RELATIONSHIP OF SOCIAL DISTRUST WITH  
PERSONAL SUFFERING: MEDIATING CAPACITY  
OF EXCESSIVE REASSURANCE SEEKING**

*Syed Nadeem Abbas Haider\**, *Safdar Husain Tahir\*\**, *Asif Ayub Kiyani\*\*\**

**\*Dream Foundation and Research Center, House No. 36 Mahria Land Sub Division Phase 2 Attock, Punjab, Pakistan; \*\*Government College University, Allama Iqbal Road, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan; \*\*\*National University of Science and Technology Business School H12, (ICT) Islamabad, Pakistan.**

**Objective:** This study investigated the relationship between Social Distrust (SD) with Personal Suffering (PS). This paper considered Excessive Reassurance Seeking (ERS) as a social method of expressing one's lack of trust on others. **Methods:** Analytical technique of linear regression was used to test the relations statistically. A sampling method of convenient and referral selection was applied to select 85 respondents from the city of Faisalabad, Pakistan. **Results:** Analysis showed that only ERS predicted PS significantly ( $B = 0.623$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Age also decreased ERS in the sample ( $B = -0.208$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). **Conclusion:** Age reduced ERS because elders became more focused on their personal objectives and therefore, they did not feel the need to confirm loyal attachment of others. Additionally, ERS contributes to increase PS as people confirm sincerity of their social circle regularly. Friends and family do not withstand constant scrutiny of their motives and individuals who use ERS intensively experience depressing loneliness in the society. *ASEAN Journal of Psychiatry, Vol. 18 (1): January – June 2017: XX XX.*

**Keywords:** Personal Suffering, PS, Excessive Reassurance Seeking, ERS, Social Distrust, SD, Elders, Aging, Depression

## Introduction

Social distrust (SD) is a socialistic element that does not allow people to believe in the honesty of others. Distrustfulness is a concept that operates to increase social distance between both stakeholders of the interpersonal relationship [1]. Excessive Reassurance Seeking (ERS) is a behavior that also signifies a presence of social insecurity in an individual.

A person wants to clear intuitive confusions and reservations about social roles of family and friends in his or her life. ERS leads to further social problems in the life of a socially doubtful person [2]. This paper targets an elusive social role of Excessive Reassurance Seeking (ERS) that crucifies oneself psychologically and physiologically in a collective society of Pakistan, specifically [3].

## Theoretical Framework

### 1. Social Distrust and Personal Suffering

Social distrust is a generic communal concept that does not allow oneself to share his or her feelings, problems and issues with others. The element of distrust could take a form of professional and personal construct at times. Social distrust may drive individuals to despise their social relations during difficult periods of life. Distrust in social relations is basically a belief that the contacted party would not ensure the wellbeing of the consulting person. The suffering individual may not ask close relations for psychological, physical and financial help as well [1].

Personal Suffering (PS) is a construct that multi-dimensionally covers the presence of

tangible and intangible painful experiences those an individual may confront in his or her course of life. The challenges could take the form of practical, familial, emotional and physical problems. The applied domain deals with one's ability to maintain the constant provision of shelter, healthcare, and schooling of children, transportation and financial resourcefulness at the personalized and familial level. An individual could also have to manage issues concerning his or her behavior with children, and he or she may have a difficult relation with his or her romantic partner. A person is potentially able to experience sexual issues such as infertility. One could also characterize severe health issues in the family as considerable hardships [4].

The tendency to go through feeling of hopelessness may grow in a suffering person. He or she could also feel the sensation of intensive and frequent fearing. Uncertainty about one's personal and professional future may also increase in an emotionally compromised individual. He or she could experience constant worrying as well. A fervently suffering person may also lose attention towards routine responsibilities in life. Additionally, one may not be able to maintain proper external outlook in the society due to mental distress. Troubled person may forego bathing for days. He or she can also experience burning sensation during urination. The suffering party would also have limited ability to breathe. A challenged individual could develop conditions like diarrhea and overeating due to stressfulness of life. Contrarily, he or she might suffer from malnourishment and cut his or her dietary intake to a minimal degree [4].

At the same time, a challenged person is going to feel strain and burnout due to unimaginable degree of tension in life. He or she could perceive swelling on various parts of body. The person in distress could also engage in wayward and undisciplined sexual relations. He or she is a potential sufferer from poor digestion and its subsequent consequences. A compromised personality may feel sores in nasal and oral cavities. A pained person could also feel frequent headaches and unexplained pain. He or she can also sense dryness and

itchiness of skin. A troubled person could experience sleep deprivation [4].

A normal human being needs to socialize in order to live a productive and healthy life. However, social distrust causes people to refrain from revealing their problems in front of others that may leave them socially isolated in difficult times. Distrusting person could feel on edge due to his or her inability to strike honest and genuine conversations with others. Eventually, the distrusting person may become lonely in the society. He or she can potentially develop depression due to his or her incompetency to establish significant social relations with others [5].

## ***2. Excessive Reassurance Seeking (ERS) and Personal Suffering (PS)***

Excessive Reassurance Seeking is a behavior that induces one to confirm the honesty of his or her social and familial relations. ERS as a construct measures generic need of the person to have normal social relations with his or her family and friends. The concept also gauges the ability to doubt the honesty of different relations in an individual [2].

Excessive Reassurance Seeking (ERS) could lead to Personal Suffering (PS) by promoting a tendency of continuously doubting sincerity of an individual's social connections. Friends and family cannot tolerate dubious behavior of a suspecting person for longer times and therefore, one who seeks reaffirmations about honesty of others regularly may destroy his or her friendships. Resultantly, doubtful person would live an isolated life without any genuine relations with others. Lack of entrusted communal ties creates psychological problems because one considers him or herself irrelevant in the social world. A communally disconnected individual may convince him or herself to commit suicide due to sheer loss of interest in life [6].

## ***3. Social Distrust and Excessive Reassurance Seeking***

Social distrust creates a fear of being deceived in a person and therefore, he or she experiences an urge to ensure honesty of his or her friends and family. A person who is

exceptionally afraid from the possibility of social betrayal could outwardly challenge the sincerity of his or her social relations repeatedly [7].

#### ***4. Social Distrust, Excessive Reassurance Seeking (ERS) and Personal Suffering (PS)***

Social Distrust causes people to engage in Excessive Reassurance Seeking (ERS) because they have to confirm honesty of their loved ones. However, regular engagement into the practice of ERS may cause one to lose significant social ties. People may feel offended by one's habit of questioning their honesty and therefore, a distrusting person who consistently doubts his or her friends' honesty would experience loneliness eventually. The element of social isolation due to presence of distrust may lead to development of mental issues such as depression [8]. A socially doubting person also foregoes interest in life because humans are social animals and therefore, they gather happiness by creating honest and constructive relations with their friends and family. A person with Social Distrust (SD) experiences enhanced level of personal suffering due to the habit of questioning others' honesty by exhibiting ERS.

#### ***Demographics and Dependent Variables***

##### ***1. Age and Excessive Reassurance Seeking***

Increasing age causes people to focus more on themselves. They become professionally absorbed with the passage of time. Aging persons also like to maintain meaningful relations with people. However, they also become habitual of seeing people leave and therefore, they do not bother to protect their social relations [9]. Resultantly, senior people do not question honesty of others, and they carry on with their personal agendas despite fragile social linkages.

##### ***2. Education and Excessive Reassurance Seeking***

Educated persons face very notable professional challenges in Pakistan due to increasing level of unemployment and they also experience financial difficulties because

of heightening level of inflation in the society. They engage in ERS more intensively to confirm presence of social and emotional support from their friends and family during difficult times [10].

##### ***3. Gender and Excessive Reassurance Seeking***

Females do not enjoy significant level of freedom in the community of Pakistan and therefore, they remain dependent on male members of their family. Women have to confirm sincerity of their caretakers by using the convention of ERS significantly [11].

##### ***4. Regional Dynamics and Reassurance Seeking***

Socioeconomic model of rural areas depends on familial coordination and therefore, farmers have to rely on their loved ones to earn their livelihood. Business and social leaders in the rural communities have to gauge loyalty and sincerity of their followers often by practicing ERS [4].

##### ***5. Age and Personal Suffering***

Age may cause personal suffering to decrease because a significant increment in one's experience occurs when he or she gets older. Additionally, an aging person feels more confident due to his or her ability to face and handle various difficulties in life. Familial and professional obligations diminish when one ages due to his or her power to outsource duties to junior members of the family and therefore, a senior person experiences less mental tension and personal suffering than a younger individual [12].

##### ***6. Education and Personal Suffering***

Education is a very challenging phenomenon in the social world of Pakistan because the country's educational model does not take cultural realities into account and therefore, academic centers of the nation confuse children with offering them individualistic mindset in the community that cherishes collective method of life. Pakistani academic model promotes personal freedom and guides students to take an individualistic course in

life. However, in the practical sense, one cannot survive without building stronger social ties in various industries that operate in the local economy of Pakistan. There is culture of personal referencing within the professional mindset of the entire nation and therefore, a newcomer should carry valuable and powerful social connections in order to achieve his or her professional objectives. Resultantly, one who takes social assistance from others to find a lucrative job would not act freely in his or her assigned organizational role. A referred employee will always listen to a person who helped in seeking an ideal position. One does not follow the path of righteousness in the society of Pakistan due to political pressures. Education socioeconomically limits one's personal freedom that causes an individual to lose interest in life and an educated person can become very depressed at times due to the inability to control his or her professional and personal destiny [13].

### **7. Gender and Personal Suffering**

Pakistan is a male dominant society and therefore, males make important organizational and familial decisions in the community. However, males also live very difficult lives due to additional duties that social system of the country places on their shoulders and therefore, men while fulfilling their obligations feel much undermined. The element of uncertainty increments in the lives of men and that leads to creation of anxiety within the personalities of males. Especially, men cannot fulfill expectations of their large families and failure in this regard contributes towards increasing the feeling of inadequacy in males [14]. Consequently, males do not live their lives optimistically in the social system of Pakistan.

### **8. Regional Dynamics and Personal Suffering**

Residents of urban areas should adhere to a difficult routine of living. They exist in a completely different socioeconomic environment than that of the rural areas and therefore, they confront an entirely different social paradox while living in the cities. People of urban areas also live under constant threat of unemployment. Additionally, they

have to manage through the fiscal demon of inflation. The cost of living consistently increases in the urban areas and therefore, people in the cities should find new sources of income in order to improve the capability to meet their expenditures. Constant need to earn money compels people of the cities to experience mental pressures that may cause them to lose sleep at night. Residents of the cities can also feel alone and hopeless due to social disintegration of families in the industrial centers of the country [15].

### **Methods**

#### ***Control Variables and Standard of including and excluding respondents in the study***

Age and education were considered as control variables for this study. Minimally, Matriculates with age of 15 years were included in the survey. The study used model of convenient and referral sampling to select a group of respondents from the city of Faisalabad in Pakistan. Researchers applied ethical standards of survey fully and therefore, administrated questionnaires did not require the sample to report any personal data and information.

#### ***Sampling Technique and Response Rate***

The method of referral sampling was applied to select respondents from various regions of Faisalabad. 120 questionnaires were handed over to respondents. However, only 85 completely filled instruments were received back with the response rate =  $85/120 = 70.08\%$ .

#### ***Ethical Approval***

Respondents were told about the nature of the conducted survey and they participated in the campaign willingly. Surveyor also permitted the participants to leave the questionnaire partially filled if they considered the questions inappropriate at any point. No personal and private data was neither collected nor reported in the study. Ethical Review Committee of NUST Business School approved the study in the present form and none of the author participated in the voting process either.

## Results

The following Table 1 shows demographics of the sample.

**Table 1. Demographics of the Sample**

Attributes	Males ( n=56) n (%)	Females (n=29) n (%)	Total (n =85)
<b>Age</b>			
<b>15-20</b>	1(1.8)	-	1 (1.2)
<b>20-25</b>	45(80.4)	29 (100)	74 (87)
<b>25-30</b>	8(14.3)	-	8 (9.4)
<b>Above</b>	2(3.6)	-	2 (2.4)
<b>Education</b>			
<b>Matric</b>	2 (3.6)	-	2 (2.35)
<b>Graduation</b>	2 (3.6)	2 (6.9)	4 (4.71)
<b>Masters</b>	40 (71.4)	26 (89.7)	66 (77.65)
<b>M.Phil.</b>	12 (21.4)	1 (3.4)	13 (15.29)
<b>Region</b>			
<b>Urban</b>	43 (76.8)	21 (72.41)	64 (75.29)
<b>Rural</b>	13 (23.2)	8 (27.59)	21 (24.71)

A total of 56 males and 29 females participated in the survey. Approximately 80% males who filled the relevant questionnaires had ages between 20 to 25 years. Only 14.3% of the men who participated in the survey reported their ages to be in between 25-30 years. A total of 3.6% respondents aged above 30 years; 1.8% of the sample had ages between 15 to 20 years; 71.4% of the male participants reported that they had cleared their Masters; 21.4% claimed to have completed the degree of M.Phil. Graduates and matriculated represented 3.6% of the sample each; 76.8% of the subjects came from an urban background. Only 23.2% of the male respondents lived in rural settings. The whole female sample reported their ages between 20 to 25 years. 89.7% of female participants had a qualification of Masters. 6.9% and 3.4% had academic qualifications of matriculation and M.Phil respectively. 72.41% of participant women belonged to urbanized areas. Only 27.59% lived in rural geographies.

A model of linear regression was performed to

investigate about the quality of different established conceptual relations. The hypothesis of mediation was tested with the help of method suggested by Hayes and Preacher [16]. Mean scores on the scales of Social Distrust (SD) and Excessive Reassurance Seeking act as independent variables that may predict changes in the average score of Personal Suffering (PS) regressively. Additionally, Social Distrust (SD) operates as an independent influence for the construct of Excessive Reassurance Seeking (ERS) as well.

### *Measures*

This academic investigation administered the instrument developed by National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) to measure Personal Suffering (PS) in respondents. (Cronbach's alpha = 0.883, items = 35). Instrument proposed by Joiner and Metalsky was applied as a gauging method for measuring Excessive Reassurance Seeking (Cronbach's alpha = 0.703 and items = 24) [2].

Instrument of Social Distrust conceptualized by Kollock was used to measure the relevant

variable (Cronbach's alpha = 0.723 and items = 5).

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics**

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
<b>Social Distrust</b>	1	5	3.15	0.845
<b>Excessive Reassurance Seeking</b>	2	4.33	3.37	0.369
<b>Personal Suffering</b>	2	4.20	3.24	0.479

Sample exhibited extreme behaviors regarding the element of Social Distrust. Respondents did not use Excessive Reassurance Seeking extremely in their lives. Participants also did not subject to ultimate level of Personal Suffering. Mean scores of Social Distrust, Excessive Reassurance Seeking and Personal Suffering were 3.15, 3.37 and 3.24

respectively. Standard deviation of each construct was 0.845, 0.369 and 0.479 correspondingly. Sample provided very divergent views about Social Distrust. However, information about Excessive Reassurance Seeking (ERS) and Personal Suffering statistically clustered.

**Table 3. Excessive Reassurance Seeking as a Dependent Variable**

Independents	B	R <sup>2</sup>	Change in R <sup>2</sup>
<b>Age</b>	- 0.208**	0.059	0.059
<b>Gender</b>	0.050 (n.s)	0.063	0.004
<b>Education</b>	0.015 (n.s)	0.064	0.001
<b>Region</b>	0.009 (n.s)	0.064	0.000
<b>Social Distrust</b>	-0.030 (n.s)	0.068	0.004

\*\*\* = p <= 0.001

\*\* = p <= 0.01 \* = p <= 0.05

n.s = Not Significant

Age causes Excessive Reassurance Seeking (ERS) to decrease (B = - 0.208, Change in R<sup>2</sup> = 0.059, p < 0.01). Age is responsible for bringing a change of 5.9% in the level of ERS. This paper accepted Hviii. Gender, Education, Region and Social Distrust (SD) do not have significant relations with Excessive

Reassurance Seeking (ERS). This investigation accepted Hxi, Hxiii, Hxv and Hx respectively. Mediation hypothesis is also rejected due to lack of notable link between Social Distrust and Excessive Reassurance Seeking.

**Table 4. Personal Suffering as a Dependent Variable**

Independents	B	R <sup>2</sup>	Change in R <sup>2</sup>
<b>Step 1</b>			
<b>Age</b>	-0.054 (ns)	0.002	0.002
<b>Gender</b>	0.144 (ns)	0.022	0.020
<b>Education</b>	0.084 (ns)	0.033	0.011
<b>Region</b>	0.008 (ns)	0.033	0.000
<b>Social Distrust</b>	-0.069 (ns)	0.047	0.014
<b>Excessive Reassurance Seeking</b>	0.623***	0.261	0.214

\*\*\* = p <= 0.001

\*\* = p <= 0.01 \* = p <= 0.05

ns = Not Significant

The factors of Age, Gender, Education, Region and Social Distrust (SD) do not

influence one's Personal Suffering (PS) significantly. However, Excessive

Reassurance Seeking increases Personal Suffering ( $B = 0.632$ , Change in  $R^2 = 0.214$ ). ERS explains 21.4% variance in Personal Suffering (PS) and therefore, Hii is acceptable.

## **Discussion**

Age increases personal experience of a person and therefore, he or she becomes confident about his or her ability to manage hardships of life. An aged individual does not depend on others to live a fulfilling life and therefore, he or she does not seek comforting reaffirmations from his or her loved ones. However, younger individuals practice ERS more because of impeding uncertainty about their personal and professional future [3]. Lack of experience causes younger adults to seek emotional soothing from their friends and family intensively. Females do not use ERS more than males because social climate of Pakistan is actually changing and therefore, women are going through the process of empowerment that invariantly, reduces ladies' dependence on male members of their families. Women do not need to confirm sincerity of their relations due to increasing level of freedom in the society [12].

Additionally, ladies grow in terms of their belief to manage challenges of life independently. Education does not challenge students significantly because curriculum of Pakistani institutions is outdated and therefore, pupils have sufficient knowledge to tackle traditional courses without any difficulty. Access to internet grows notably in the society and therefore, students can accumulate information about any subject in the world readily.

However, students study specific subjects in schools that do not challenge their academic and intellectual capacity considerably. Advancement of education does not cause students to exhibit ERS because of their confidence to deal with academic issues without taking emotional and social support from their loved ones [11]. Mutual confidence between family members is strong in both rural and urban areas due to collective culture of the community and therefore, people do not resort to ERS to evaluate honesty of their social relations in cities and villages [5].

Social distrust is also not influencing attitudes of people because sense of familial and social belonging is powerful that does not drive people to doubt sincerity of their social and familial linkages [8]. Personal Suffering (PS) does not increment due to the aging process because elders do not face stress. Elders become dependent on the next generation to live a prosperous life. Tighter familial regimes cause younger individuals to take good care of their elders and therefore, older persons do not experience problems and challenges in meeting their basic needs of shelter, food and medical services [12]. Men do not face more Personal Suffering because social roles of both genders change significantly during recent years. Men share responsibilities of raising children with their wives and therefore, stronger family system encourages ladies to become more active in terms of ensuring better future for their next generation.

Men and women participate on relatively equal terms to make progress of the family possible and therefore, both parties do not experience Personal Suffering due to unmanageable responsibilities [1]. Educational progress also does not subject people to enhancing degree of Personal Suffering (PS) because families tend to support fresh graduates in finding jobs or establishing new businesses. The trend of starting new organizations is tremendously growing in the society of Pakistan. New graduates are also able to find online work readily and therefore, they do not experience the pains of unemployment for a longer period of time [17].

Urban economies are expanding at a faster rate and therefore, people in the cities have lucrative opportunities to increase their earnings. Population of the developed parts of the country does not expose to Personal Suffering (PS) because of enriched climate of the cities. Individuals who live in the cities provide their families with constructive socioeconomic future and they do not experience depression due to lack of financial resources [14].

Social Distrust does not prevail as a statistically valid concept in the community of Pakistan because familial integration is higher.

People notably trust their relatives and therefore, they do not confront substantial problems in their lives. Leaders of the families use their political influence to resolve professional and personal challenges of their relatives to sustain mental peacefulness in the lives of loved ones [8]. Excessive Reassurance Seeking (ERS) plays a noticeable hand in terms of increasing Personal Suffering (PS) [6]. ERS is a social symptom of uncertainty in one's personality and therefore, a mentally troubled person should avoid seeking advice from people who are not trained to resolve mental issues. However, an individual experiencing anxiety should consult with a psychologist instead of relying on ordinary people for guidance about a highly sophisticated scientific problem.

### ***Social and Familial Implications***

Social integration of the families is providing protection to the members from different physical and psychological problems. Familial protective dynamics are working as a mechanism to counteract inefficiencies of the legal system. Disputes and problems are resolved informally in the culture of Pakistan because no one trusts nationalized institutions of justice. Professional placements occur under the influence of politics and therefore, one requires strong social connections in order to progress professionally [8].

Elders enjoy increasing degree of social protection from the family because society does not have effective institutions to ensure sustenance of physically weaker persons and therefore, religious centers of the country emphasize on familial rights of elders to induce families to take care of their vulnerable members.

Younger individuals are majorly responsible to provide necessities of life to the elders and therefore, Personal Suffering is declining with increasing age. Social system of Pakistan behaviorally establishes that younger individuals should lead the families and older persons should rest because they have done the same in their youth. Elders do not exercise Excessive Reassurance Seeking (ERS) because they subliminally trust younger members of the family to sustainably provide

them with their needs of life. Excessive Reassurance Seeking (ERS) is an incremental factor that increases Personal Suffering (PS). ERS is a behavioral manifestation of underlying fear of abandonment and therefore, family members should emotionally and socially reconnect with the person who exhibits ERS considerably to win his or her faith once again [8].

This study only covered one locality of Pakistan and therefore, one cannot generate nationalistic findings. Sample is also smaller and respondents filled self-report measures during the survey that may cause this work to produce biased results. However, all of the instruments had considerably higher reliabilities.

### ***Future Directions for Research***

Sample size should be increased in order to further validate quality of established statistical relations. Future projects must include the construct of social paranoia to see if social trust within the family contributes towards making people afraid of outsiders. The variable of ERS Sought to be linked with Life Satisfaction Scale as well.

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**Corresponding author: Syed Nadeem Abbas Haider, Dream Foundation and Research Center, House No. 36 Mahria Land Sub Division Phase 2 Attock, Punjab, Pakistan.**

**Email:** ndhaider2000@gmail.com

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