

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Social Anxiety and the Quality of Life among Undergraduate Students in UiTM Puncak Alam Campus

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## Abstract:

Social anxiety disorder is frequent in children and adolescents, strongly associated with other anxiety disorders, depression, and substance use disorders. **Objective:** To assess the level of social anxiety and the quality of life among students in UiTM Puncak Alam Campus. **Method:** A cross-sectional study was conducted among the students from UiTM Puncak Alam Campus, Selangor. A total of 416 respondents were recruited by using convenience sampling. Questionnaire was divided into 3 parts: Part A: seven questions on demographic data, Part B: 24 questions on Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS) and Part C: 26 questions on Quality of Life Questionnaire (WHOQOL-BREF). **Results:** From 416 respondents, 148 (35.6%) had mild level of social anxiety and 49 (11.8%) had severe social anxiety. The quality of life (QoL) for the environment domain had the highest mean ( $68.20 \pm 16.81$ ), while psychological had the lowest mean ( $61.88 \pm 18.63$ ) compared to other domains. There was statistically significance relationship between social anxiety and quality of life,  $p < 0.001$ . **Conclusion:** Social anxiety can be affected by many factors throughout entire phase of life and quality of life (QoL) also can contributed to the social anxiety problems.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Social anxiety, also known as social phobia, is a highly prevalent anxiety disorder (Iverach & Rapee, 2014). Social anxiety is one of the most common anxiety disorders, affecting between 5 and 15% of the adult population (Lindgaard et al., 2020). Anxiety disorders are different from typical uneasiness or anxiety, which involve extreme fear or anxiety and impact almost 30% of adults at some point in their lives. It is characterized by these persistent, excessive anxious feelings and accompanied by physical symptoms such as rapid heart rate, sweating, and full-blown attacks when experiencing something that people feared (American Psychiatric Association, 2021).

A national survey revealed that one in five adults is suffering from depression (18.3%), two in five adults suffering anxiety (39.7%), and one in ten adults suffering from stress (Chonghui et al., 2018). According to the National Health and Morbidity Survey (2015), the frequency of mental health problems among Malaysian adults has risen from 10.7% in 1996 to 11.2% in 2006 and 29.2% in 2015. Malaysian students account for one out of every ten cases recorded in 2011 to one out of every five cases reported in 2016. In Selangor, the prevalence of generalized anxiety disorder among adults is 8.2% (Maideen et al., 2015);

however, there is no exact data on social anxiety disorder among teenagers in Malaysia.

World Health Organization (2012) defined the Quality of life (QoL) as an individual's view of their place in life about their objectives, expectations, standards, and concerns in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live. It is a broad term that encompasses various factors such as physical, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Poor mental health can affect the quality of life among people, especially the younger generation as they are more vulnerable to anxiety, burnout, and depression. In addition, poor mental health can be triggered by other factors such as the inability to access social relationships in real life without limitations.

Awareness about social anxiety need to be created so that the society is more sensitive and do not take lightly regarding mental health-related diseases. People with a social anxiety disorder will try their best to avoid situations that will worsen or trigger the symptoms, affecting their study, job performance, and personal relationship with other people. Boschen et al. (2017) stated that repetitive negative thinking associated with adverse effects in psychological disorders such as anxiety usually occurs in the negative mood state or stress that can limit their ability to use other cognitive functions. Stigma is one of the deterring factors for seeking mental help in various populations. Negative stigma causes

many sufferers to be afraid to seek help from professionals. In a study of the usage of psychiatric care, it was discovered that only about 33% of students with mental health problems were treated (Ibrahim et al., 2019). Rosli (2017) stated that research on mental health stigma, literacy, and attitudes in Malaysia lacks comparison to other nations, thus, the current knowledge regarding social anxiety need to be increased. The objective of this study is to determine the relationship between level of social anxiety and the quality of life among undergraduate students of UiTM Puncak Alam Campus.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 2.1. Study design and Setting

This study was using descriptive quantitative with an approach of cross-sectional study design. The study was conducted at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Selangor, Puncak Alam Campus.

### 2.2. Respondents

Using the convenience sampling method, undergraduate students from eight faculties; Health Sciences, Pharmacy, Accountancy, Architecture, Planning and Surveying, Education, Business Management, Hotel and Tourism, and Art and Design were selected in this study. The respondents were chosen according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Therefore, the applicable inclusion criteria in this research were undergraduate students and able to understand the Malay/English language. Meanwhile, post-graduate students and those who had a history of clinically diagnosed mental illness in themselves or their families were excluded from this study.

### 2.3. Data Collection

Ethical approval from the UiTM Research Ethics Committee (REC/03/2021(UG/MR/113) has been obtained. The researchers included information sheet and consent form in the online questionnaires to give brief explanation to the respondents. The researchers also provided contact numbers to allow respondents to ask if there were any query. Due to the current situation of the Covid-19 pandemic, the researchers were only able to collect data by using an online questionnaire. The representatives from each faculty were contacted to share the questionnaires. The researchers also contacted the respondents personally. The questionnaire was administered by the respondents using Google form from the Google link given. The questionnaire contained three parts that needed to be answered by the respondents. Overall, the respondents took about 30 minutes to complete the questions.

## 2.4. Instruments

In this study, the researchers used questionnaire consisted of 50-items and was divided into three parts, socio-demographic, The Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS) and The Quality of Life Questionnaire (WHOQOL-BREF).

The Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS) questionnaire adapted from Iqbal and Ajmal (2018). The LSAS was designed to assess the variety of social interaction and performance settings that individuals who suffered from social anxiety fear and/or avoid. LSAS consisted of 24-items divided into two subscales and each item was rated from 0-3. The LSAS obtained high reliability with the Cronbach's alpha of 0.972.

Table 2.1: Score ranges of LSAS

Score ranges	Level of social anxiety
<50	Mild
50-65	Moderate
65-80	Marked
80-95	Severe
>95	Very severe

The Quality of Life Questionnaire (WHOQOL-BREF), adapted from Alkatheri et al. (2020), was an international cross-culturally comparable Quality of Life assessment instrument. It consisted of 26 questions with four domains; physical health, psychological health, social relationships, and environmental health. The questionnaire was measured by the Likert scale, with scores ranging from 1 to 5. Higher score denote higher QoL, with a possible range of 8-40, 6-30, 3-15 and 9-45 in the physical health, psychological health, social relationships and environment domain, respectively. The WHOQOL-BREF obtained in this study show high reliability with the Cronbach's alpha of 0.937.

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 416 students within the range of age between 19 to 25 years old completed the questionnaire, representing a response rate of 95%. Table 3.1 show female respondents recorded higher participation with 83.9% than male respondents with only 16.1% overall. The respondents came from eight faculties in UiTM Puncak Alam Campus. Health Sciences students were the highest participants in the study (13.2%), followed by Business Management and Architecture, Planning and Surveying faculties with 12.7%. The least participation came from the Faculty of Accountancy (12%). Most respondents were degree students (97.6%) and Year 4 students (29.8%).

Table 3.1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (N=416)

Socio-demographic	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>Age</b>		
19	6	1.4
20	59	14.2
21	74	17.8
22	106	25.5
23	116	27.9
24	27	6.5
25	28	6.7
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	67	16.1
Female	349	83.9
<b>Faculty</b>		
Health Sciences	55	13.2
Business Management	53	12.7
Education	51	12.3
Pharmacy	51	12.3
Accountancy	50	12.0
Hotel and Tourism	51	12.3
Art and Design	52	12.5
Architecture, Planning and Surveying	53	12.7
<b>Educational level</b>		
Diploma	10	2.4
Degree	406	97.6
<b>Year of study</b>		
1	95	22.8
2	87	20.9
3	110	26.4
4	124	29.8

**3.2. Level of Social Anxiety among Undergraduate Students in UiTM Puncak Alam Campus**

Most of the respondents N=148 (35.6%) reported suffering from mild social anxiety with a mean of 4.55 (SD=2.21). Marked and very severe social anxiety recorded respondents (n=67) with a mean of 4.34 (SD=2.48) and 4.55 (SD=2.16). The lowest level of social anxiety reported was severe social anxiety, n=49(11.8%) with a mean of 3.94 ± 2.34.

Table 3.2: Level of social anxiety among undergraduate students in UiTM Puncak Alam Campus (N=416)

Level of social anxiety	Frequency (%)	Mean (SD)
Mild	148 (35.6)	4.55 (2.21)
Moderate	85 (20.4)	4.69 (2.49)
Marked	67 (16.1)	4.34 (2.48)
Severe	49 (11.8)	3.94 (2.34)
Very severe	67 (16.1)	4.55 (2.16)

**3.3. Quality of Life among Undergraduate Students of UiTM Puncak Alam**

As shown in Table 3.3, students recorded the highest quality of life overall in the environment domain with a mean of 68.20 ± 16.81. The physical and social domains followed it with a mean of 64.03 ± 15.61 and 63.74 ± 21.14, respectively. From the total of 416 students, the psychological domain recorded the lowest score achieved by the students with a mean of 61.88 ± 18.63.

Table 3.3: Quality of life among undergraduate students of UiTM Puncak Alam in four domains (N=416)

	Mean ± SD	Median (IQR)
Physical	64.03 ± 15.61	64.29 (21)
Psychological	61.88 ± 18.63	62.50 (25)
Social	63.74 ± 21.14	66.67 (25)
Environment	68.20 ± 16.81	68.75 (22)

**3.4. The Relationship between Level of Social Anxiety and the Quality of Life among Undergraduate Students in UiTM Puncak Alam Campus**

The Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to assess the relationship between the level of social anxiety and the level of quality of life among students in UiTM Puncak Alam Campus. Results in Table 3.4 showed the quality of life in the psychological domain was H(4)=82.52, p<0.001. Meanwhile, physical domain in quality of life showed H(4)=74.92, p<0.001. All levels of social anxiety showed p<0.001. Therefore, there was a statistically significant between the levels of social anxiety towards the quality of life.

Table 3.4: Relationship between the level of social anxiety and the quality of life (N=416)

Variables	QoL domain											
	Social anxiety	Physical (median, IQR)	H stat (df)	P value	Psychological (median, IQR)	H stat (df)	P value	Social (median, IQR)	H stat (df)	P value	Environment (median, IQR)	H stat (df)
Mild	71.43 (21)	74.92 (4)	0.001	72.92 (21)	82.52 (4)	0.001	75.00 (25)	39.08 (4)	0.001	75.00 (21)	64.66 (4)	0.001
Moderate	64.29 (14)			62.50 (19)			66.67 (29)			68.75 (16)		
Marked	64.29 (14)			66.67 (25)			66.67 (25)			71.88 (19)		
Severe	60.71 (25)			54.17 (25)			58.33 (29)			65.63 (19)		
Very severe	50.00 (21)			50.00 (29)			50.00 (25)			56.25 (22)		

\*Kruskal-Wallis

Table 3.5 showed the pairwise comparisons between levels of social anxiety in the four domains from the post hoc test. In the physical domain, Very severe-Moderate (P<0.001), Very severe-Marked (P<0.001), Very severe-Mild (P<0.001) were the most significant. In the psychological domain, Very severe-Moderate (P<0.001), Very severe-Marked (P<0.001), Very severe-Mild (P<0.001) showed high significance. In the social domain, Very severe-Mild showed

high significance to each other with P<0.001. Meanwhile, in the environment domain, Very severe-Moderate, Very severe-Marked, and Very severe-Mild were the most significant with P<0.001.

Table 3.5: Pairwise results between levels of social anxiety in four domains

Variables	Adj. p-value				
	Sample 1-Sample 2	Physical	Psychological	Social	Environment
<b>Social Anxiety</b>					
Very severe-Severe		0.009	0.312	1.000	0.009
Very severe-Moderate		0.000	0.000	0.059	0.000
Very severe-Marked		0.000	0.000	0.003	0.000
Very severe-Mild		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Severe-Moderate		1.000	0.646	1.000	1.000
Severe-Marked		1.000	0.574	0.562	1.000
Severe-Mild		0.001	0.000	0.002	0.010
Moderate-Marked		1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Moderate-Mild		0.003	0.001	0.096	0.031
Marked-Mild		0.010	0.006	0.494	0.162

\*Post hoc test of Kruskal-Wallis

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Students' time and financial resources are needed during the academic year with no promises of a decent return, resulting in a lower quality of life (Ribeiro et al., 2018). Adaptation to the new phase and environment also may influence students' social life in which they need to meet new faces. They must face new obstacles, make judgments, adjust to academic demands, and learn to communicate with a wide variety of new individuals (Daniel et al., 2020). They could have difficulties starting a conversation or feel anxious when being around someone new and unfamiliar. In this study, fourth-year students were the highest respondent (29.8%), and their quality of life was assumed to be most affected as they were in their final year. Due to their heavy workload and the competency exams they must pass, students in fourth-year may feel more burdened and under pressure (Burdurlu et al., 2020).

Female students were expected to have a higher level of social anxiety and poor quality of life than male students. Body image and low self-esteem could be contributing factors to why female students suffered social anxiety more than males. According to Taha et al. (2017), obesity and dissatisfaction with body weight were linked to a higher prevalence of social anxiety, especially in women. Moreover, female students commonly feared them because they are more concerned about what others are thinking or evaluating their actions, particularly negative peer group judgments (Iqbal & Ajmal, 2019). Male students, on the other hand, are thought to be more social and accept social situations easily than female students.

The findings from the study reported that all the 416 students suffered from a variety of levels of social anxiety, from mild to very severe social anxiety. Most of the students, which 148 students (35.6%) had mild social anxiety. Surprisingly, there were students who suffered from very severe social anxiety, by a total of 67 students (16.1%). Findings from the study showed that most of students felt fear and avoid from acting, performing or speaking in front of an audience. Takac et al. (2019) stated that fear of public speaking is classified as non-generalized social anxiety disorder and associated with performance situations involving perceived scrutiny by others that can impacts social academic, and career opportunities. People who experience anxiety about speaking in public seek to avoid circumstances in which they must perform, but when they do, they experience severe distress and worry (Raja, 2017). The fear and avoidance toward performance situations must be related to them disliking being the center of attention. Leigh and Clark (2018) stated that most things that involved being observed by others are difficult as sufferers are afraid of saying or doing something that would humiliate or embarrass them.

The results showed that the quality of life for environment domain had the highest mean followed by physical, then social, and finally the psychological domain. A study conducted by Naseem et al. (2016) revealed similar results, in which the highest domain for quality of life was the environmental domain with the highest overall mean score (70.43), followed by the physical (69.39), social (68.68), and psychological (66.48). It was discovered that, even though students in different years are exposed to varying learning environments and workloads, there was no significant difference in the quality of life of students based on their academic year.

There are program's structure and the numerous preparations students had to go through before moving on to the next academic level. University students stand out in the population because their interests, burdens, and worries differ from those of other demographic groups (Mohamad et al., 2020). Academic expectations, social hurdles, and financial hardships are among the strains they face. These young adults are at a higher risk of physical and mental health disruption since their long-term lifestyle begins in their undergraduate years. Poor quality of life among university students can result in psychological problems, such as strained interpersonal relationships, low self-esteem, and depression (Pedrelli et al., 2015). Malibary et al. (2019) defined that the quality of life of university students as the level of satisfaction they felt as a result of both intellectual and social variables throughout their university experience. One possible explanation is that higher-performing students are under more pressure to improve and sustain their academic achievement than those who perform poorly and are uninterested in either peer competition or getting high grades.

The results reported that there was a statistically significant relationship between the levels of social anxiety towards the quality of life. This finding was in agreement with a study by Hajure and Abdu (2020) who was also found that students with a higher level of social anxiety had low scores on all areas of life quality, including physical and psychological health, social relationships, and the environment. People with social anxiety were more likely to be unhappy with their health, suffer from depression and psychological distress, have a low quality of life, and feel dissatisfied with many aspects of life.

The primary factor leading to poor quality of life is mixed of negative feelings. Nervousness, overthinking, and insecurities in which the person may experience extreme tension and distress over everything at one time (Norhizan et al., 2019). Social anxiety has a wide-ranging impact on

people's lives, affecting their ability to function in a variety of areas and lowering their overall mood and well-being. Individuals with social anxiety, for example, are more likely to be bullied, to leave classes early, to have insufficient qualifications, to report more days absent from classes, and to have more poor performance (Jefferies & Ungar, 2020). As social anxiety can make someone physically and psychologically unstable, thus, social anxiety disorder has a negative impact on life satisfaction. Physical and role functioning were impacted, particularly in areas such as leisure and social life (Al-Omari, 2017).

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Firstly, the idea proposed was that future studies employ a random sample method for data collection because it reduced the risk of respondent bias and balanced the respondents' gender, male and female. Balanced respondents' gender was significant if the research that was taken place wants to study the level of social anxiety between males and females. Furthermore, future research would be more beneficial if the risk factors that cause an increase in the level of social anxiety were being studied, such as parenting style, early traumatic experiences, or social expectations. The study towards the risk factor may contribute to the findings on what causes the respondents to have a different level of social anxiety.

In conclusion the findings from this study found that most of the students had mild social anxiety and some of them even suffered with very severe social anxiety. It was shown that they were more likely to fear and avoid from acting, performing or speaking in front of an audience and being the center of attention. For quality of life, psychological domain was the most affected. The impact on students' psychological could be related to their social relationships with others and academic burden in university's life. Meanwhile, the least affected was the environment domain that could be concluded that most of them were satisfied with the access to facilities around them. Study concluded that there is significant relationship between level of social anxiety and the quality of life among undergraduate students in UiTM Puncak Alam Campus.

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