The Role of Perceived Stress and Emotional Intelligence on Social Anxiety among Young Adults in Ekiti State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The role of perceived stress, emotional intelligence on social anxiety among young adults selected across institutions in Ekiti State using a quantitative research design, data were collected from 198 students across three institutions. The findings revealed that students who reported higher levels of perceived stress also experienced significantly greater social anxiety (t (196) = 2.36, p < .05). However, perceived stress did not have a significant association with emotional intelligence (F (1, 196) = 0.12, p > .05). Notably, perceived stress was significantly linked to an increase in avoidance of social interaction, a sub-scale of social anxiety (F (1, 196) = 9.91, p < .01). The study also found that dimensions of emotional intelligence neither independently nor jointly predicted social anxiety (R² = .02, F (4, 193) = 0.79, p > .05). Additionally, there was no significant joint influence of perceived stress and emotional intelligence on social anxiety (R² = .03, F (2, 195) = 2.64, p > .05). These results highlight the complex interactions between stress, emotional intelligence, and social anxiety, offering valuable insights for mental health interventions within academic environments. The findings also suggest the need for further research, particularly in diverse contexts, given the contradictory results when compared with previous studies.

Keywords: *Perceived stress, Emotional Intelligence, Social Anxiety, Young adults*

INTRODUCTION

We live in a minefield of triggers. These triggers are stressors we are exposed to in our environment which are capable of causing physiological and psychological strain. These triggers could cause one to feel anxious. Anxiety is sometimes referred to as the psychological equivalent of physical pain (Griffin, 1990). Anxiety is a feeling that is typified by apprehension and physical signs of tension, where a person expects danger, disaster, or bad luck to strike. When the body perceives a threat, it frequently reacts by tightening its muscles, increasing respiration, and quickening the heartbeat. Although the phrases anxiety and fear are frequently used interchangeably, there are conceptual and physiological differences between the two. While fear is a natural, short-term response to immediate threats, anxiety persists over time, even when the threat is unclear or diffuse (Liebowitz et al., 2000).

In this sense, social anxiety is often a long-lasting emotional response, driven by the anticipation of social rejection or embarrassment. Young adults, especially university students, face a unique set of stressors such as academic pressures, relationship dynamics, and the transition into adulthood—that can exacerbate social anxiety (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Human beings are inherently social, relying on verbal and non-verbal cues, such as gestures, facial expressions, and posture, to communicate and build connections. However, an inability to navigate social interactions can result in isolation and hinder psychological well-being (Liberman et al., 1989). Social anxiety, a pervasive form of anxiety, disrupts daily interactions, and has long-lasting effects on an individual's personal and professional life.

Emotional Intelligence

The ability to identify, comprehend, and control one's own emotions as well as those of others is known as emotional intelligence (EI). Perceiving emotions, understanding emotions, controlling emotions, and using emotions to facilitate thinking are the four main components of emotional intelligence (EI), which was first proposed by Mayer and Salovey (1997). Better emotional regulation has been associated with emotional intelligence, enabling people to manage stress and difficulties in more healthful ways (Goleman, 1995).

Emotional intelligence is often contrasted with traditional cognitive intelligence (IQ). While IQ emphasizes intellectual abilities, EI emphasizes the importance of emotional regulation and awareness in facilitating decision-making and behaviour. Emotional intelligence enables individuals to think more clearly in emotionally charged situations, providing them with tools to manage stress and interpersonal challenges more effectively (Cobb & Mayer, 2000).

Balancing emotional and cognitive intelligence is crucial for good personal and professional performance. When both are in sync, individuals can adapt more readily to challenges by using their emotional insights to complement rational thinking, thus promoting better problem-solving strategies. Given its potential to impact mental health, the role of EI in reducing social anxiety and stress warrants deeper investigation.

Social Anxiety

Social anxiety is a multifaceted condition shaped by both genetic and environmental factors. Behavioral inhibition in early childhood has been linked to a higher risk of developing social anxiety later in life. Kids who get scared easily when things change often grow up to be more fearful. This fear can stick with them as they get older (Schwartz et al., 1999). Additionally, family history plays a significant role in the development of social anxiety, with studies indicating that individuals with relatives who suffer from this condition are more likely to experience similar challenges (Mannuzza et al., 1995; Liebowitz et al, 2000).

Recent shifts in the understanding of intelligence have introduced the concept of emotional intelligence (EI) as a vital complement to traditional cognitive intelligence (IQ). Historically, academic intelligence was considered the primary determinant of success; however, EI has gained

recognition for its ability to influence interpersonal relationships, emotional regulation, and overall well-being (Kılıç et al., 2007). As emotional intelligence becomes increasingly valued, it suggests that both emotional and cognitive abilities must work together for individuals to thrive in social environments.

Stress

The term "stress" originally emerged as a variant of "distress" in the fourteenth century. In medieval contexts, it described physical hardship, including pain, torture, and starvation. Today, the Oxford English Dictionary defines stress as a mental or emotional strain resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances. It refers to a state of tension, anxiety, or exhaustion caused by life's pressures.

Hans Selye, regarded as the modern "father of stress," first described stress in 1936 as the "non-specific response of the body to any demand for change." In 1979, he expanded this definition to include perception, noting that stress results from the demands placed on an individual, often due to the overwhelming number of choices they face. Skinner in 1985 defined stress as "a reaction of a particular individual to a stimulus event

Stress is a natural part of life and is necessary for survival. However, it becomes problematic when it disrupts daily functioning. Stress impacts nearly every bodily system, altering physical health and behavior. People experience stress when they believe they are unable to handle the obligations placed on them or the dangers to their health (Lazarus, 1966). "Stress occurs when pressure exceeds your perceived ability to cope" is a straightforward concept that can be used (Palmer, 1999).

Types of Stress

Not all stress is harmful; it can be both positive and negative, depending on the context:

Acute Stress: A short-term response to immediate challenges, such as deadlines or unexpected changes. It can be motivating or distressing but typically resolves quickly.

Chronic Stress: Prolonged stress arising from persistent situations, like an unhappy marriage or financial troubles. Chronic stress is often linked to long-term health problems, including heart disease and depression.

Episodic Acute Stress: Frequent, recurring short-term stress that becomes a way of life. Individuals with this form of stress often feel overwhelmed and struggle with ongoing challenges.

Eustress: A positive form of stress that energizes and motivates individuals to meet challenges. Examples include preparing for competitions or tackling meaningful projects. Eustress promotes personal growth and resilience, unlike distress, which is harmful.

Stress can also be classified into physical and psychological categories, each with distinct effects:

Physical Stress: Affects the body through symptoms such as muscle tension, fatigue, and headaches. Over time, it can lead to health issues like hypertension and weakened immunity.

Psychological Stress: Includes emotional, cognitive, and perceptual stress. Emotional stress may involve fear, anger, or grief, while cognitive stress results from overthinking, guilt, or self-criticism. Perceptual stress stems from personal beliefs or worldviews that shape how challenges are interpreted.

Perceived Stress: Perceived stress refers to how an individual interprets and responds to stressors, making it a highly personal experience. Two people exposed to the same situation may perceive and react to the stress differently, depending on factors such as their background, personality, coping mechanisms, and social support systems. According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), perceived stress is a psychological response to a perceived challenge or threat, and it can be influenced by a variety of factors, such as an individual's background, personality, coping style, and social support network. Cohen et al. (2013) define perceived stress as "a psychological experience of strain and difficulty in dealing with the demands of life." They also note that perceived stress is a common and normal response to stressors, and that it can be adaptive in small doses, but can become maladaptive when it becomes chronic.

Kabat-Zinn (2003) defines perceived stress as "the experience of strain or discomfort that arises when we perceive that our needs, values, or goals are not being met, or that we are not able to meet the demands of our environment." Perceived stress is closely linked to social anxiety. When stress activates the body's "fight or flight" response, it triggers physiological symptoms such as increased heart rate, sweating, and muscle tension. For individuals with social anxiety, these physical responses can exacerbate feelings of distress and lead to the avoidance of social interactions. Hu et al. (2017) found that people with Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD) are particularly sensitive to these physiological reactions, making perceived stress a significant factor in their experiences.

Objectives of Study
The specific objectives are to:
i.   examine the significant effect of emotional intelligence on social anxiety
ii.   evaluate emotional intelligence on social anxiety.
iii.   investigate insights into potential interventions that could improve emotional intelligence as a means to reduce perceived stress and social anxiety.

Hypotheses
1   Perceived stress will serve as a predictor of social anxiety among young adults
2.   Emotional intelligence will be a significant predictor of social anxiety among young adults
3.   Perceived stress and Emotional Intelligence will jointly predict social anxiety among young adults

METHOD
Research Design
This research is purely a survey method of research that attempt to investigate, measure and sample people's opinion on the assessment of the role of perceived stress and emotional intelligence on social anxiety among undergraduates in Ekiti state through the use of standardized questionnaires.
Population
The population of this study consisted of randomly selected students from three tertiary institutions in Ekiti State. Two hundred (200) questionnaires were distributed to the respondents. Only 198 were recovered.

Variables

There are three variables in this research work; Predictive Variable: Perceived stress, Emotional Intelligence. Criterion Variable: Social anxiety.

Sampling Method

A stratified cluster sampling approach with blind selection was employed. This probability sampling technique involves segmenting the population into subgroups (strata) based on shared characteristics. In this study, we will first divide the undergraduate population by senatorial districts within Ekiti State. These districts function as our strata. To ensure a representative sample across these strata, a documented blind selection process was employed (Ekiti Central, Ekiti North, and Ekiti South). All students enrolled within these chosen universities were allowed to participate in the study. This approach offers a balance between efficiency and generalizability by incorporating a documented and unbiased random selection process while considering the geographic distribution of higher institutions within Ekiti.

Procedure for Data Collection

To gather data, the researcher employed a survey methodology, distributing a total of 200 questionnaires across three tertiary institutions in Ekiti State: Federal Polytechnic, Ado Ekiti (FEDPOLYADO/FPA), Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology (BOUESTI), and Federal University Oye-Ekiti (FUOYE). Prior to participation, informed consent was obtained from all respondents. To ensure clarity and maximize participation, the researcher provided a thorough explanation of the study's purpose and the meaning of each questionnaire item. Unequal gender representation was included in the sample. After a designated completion time, the questionnaires were collected and anonymized to guarantee confidentiality. The researchers expressed their gratitude to all participants for their valuable contribution. Following data collection, the questionnaires were assigned unique identification codes and subsequently scored in preparation for further analysis.

Research Instrument

Questionnaires comprising of four (4) sections were used in this study. Section A of the scale measures the demographic characteristics (i.e Sex) of the participants, Section B of the scale measures perceived stress, section C of the scale measures the level of emotional intelligence of the participants and section D comprises of a scale measuring social anxiety.

Psychometric Properties of the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS- 10)

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS- 10) is a widely used instrument for assessing perceived stress in adults. This concise measure offers valuable insights for researchers and practitioners alike. Here's a detailed analysis of its validity, reliability, scoring, and interpretation:

Validity

Construct Validity: The PSS exhibits strong construct validity, correlating well with other measures of stress, such as the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) and the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS) (Lee, 2012).

Predictive Validity: The scale has predictive validity, as higher scores on the PSS have been associated with increased risk of stress-related health outcomes, supporting its effectiveness in measuring perceived stress (Cohen & Williamson, 1988).

Reliability

Internal Consistency: Studies report Cronbach's The PSS has demonstrated good internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.78 to 0.91 across different populations, ensuring reliable measurement of perceived stress (Cohen et al., 1983). This means the various items within the scale measure a similar underlying construct (perceived stress).

Test- retest reliability: Test-retest reliability is satisfactory with correlation coefficients around 0.85 over a short interval, indicating that the measure is stable over time (Roberti, Harrington, & Storch, 2006).

Scoring

The PSS- 10 is a succinct, 10-item self-report inventory. The questions in the PSS-10 asks about feelings and thoughts during the last one month. To calculate a total PSS score, responses to the four positively stated items (items 4, 5, 7, and 8) first need to be reversed. Each item is rated on am5-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (never) to 4 (very often). Scores on the PSS-10 are derived by summing the ratings across all items. Individual scores can range from 0 to 40. Higher total scores indicate higher levels of perceived stress.

Interpretation:

Scores ranging from 0 - 13 would be considered low stress.

Scores ranging from 14 - 26 would be considered moderate stress.

Scores ranging from 27- 40 would be considered high perceived stress.

Psychometric properties of Schutte self - report emotional intelligence test (SSEIT)

The Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT) is a widely used self-assessment tool that measures a person's overall emotional intelligence (EI). Developed by Dr. Nicola Schutte and her colleagues, it assesses four key components of EI:

Emotion perception: Recognizing emotions in oneself and others.

Utilizing emotions: Harnessing emotions to facilitate problem-solving and decision-making.

Managing emotions in oneself: Regulating one's own emotional responses.

Managing emotions in others: Understanding and influencing the emotions of others.

The SSEIT provides a valuable snapshot of an individual's emotional intelligence by utilizing a self-reported questionnaire format.

The items comprising the sub-scales based on these factors (Ciarrochi et al., 2001) are as follows: Perception of Emotion (items 5, 9, 15, 18, 19, 22, 25, 29, 32, 33), Managing Own Emotions (items 2, 3, 10, 12, 14, 21, 23, 28, 31), Managing Others' Emotions (items 1, 4, 11, 13, 16, 24, 26, 30), and Utilization of Emotion (items 6, 7, 8, 17, 20, 27). All 33 items are included in one of these four sub-scales.

Validity:

Concurrent Validity: The SSEIT shows some positive correlations with other established EI measures like the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue) (Ciarrochi et al., 2001). This suggests the SSEIT captures aspects of emotional intelligence that overlap with other recognized measures.

Cross-Cultural Validity: While research suggests validity for specific populations like Nigerian adolescents (Onuigbo et al., 2017) and American adults (Schutte et al., 1998), more studies are needed to determine its effectiveness across diverse cultures.

Reliability:
Internal Consistency: Studies report Cronbach's Alpha coefficients ranging from .78 to .90, indicating good internal consistency within the test itself. This means the various items within the SSEIT measure a similar underlying construct (emotional intelligence).

Validation of the Schutte Self-report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT) on Nigerian Adolescents (Aniemeka, 2016). This study reports a Cronbach's Alpha of .90 for the Nigerian adolescent population.

Test Retest Reliability: Schutte et al. (1998) found a test-retest reliability coefficient of .78 for the total EI scores in their original study, with a two-week interval between administrations ([Schutte et al., 1998] as cited in [Omics International, 2014]). This suggests the SSEIT can produce relatively stable scores over a short period.

Scoring:
To calculate a total score, responses to items 5, 28, and 33 first need to be reversed. Scores on the SSEIT are derived by summing the ratings across all items. Scores can range from 33 to 165, with higher scores indicating more characteristic emotional intelligence.

Interpretation:
The SSEIT scale is simple to understand and score, and it has been used in several research with a variety of groups, including adolescents, adults, and secondary school apprentices. A cut-off score of 90 on the SSEIT is typically used. According to Mayer's criteria, an SSEIT score of 89 or lower includes the following: consider improvement (70-89) and consider development (69 or less), whereas an SSEIT score of 90 or more includes the following: low average (90-99), high average (100-109), competent (110-119), strength (120-129), and considerable strength (130+).

Psychometric properties of Liebowitz social anxiety scale (LSAS)
The Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS), developed in 1987, is a widely used tool to assess the severity and specific situations that trigger social anxiety disorder (SAD) in individuals.

Validity:
Convergent Validity: The LSAS shows positive correlations with other established measures of social anxiety and social phobia (Kashou et al., 2009). This suggests the LSAS captures aspects of social anxiety that overlap with other recognized measures.

Discriminant Validity: The LSAS shows lower correlations with measures of other disorders, such as depression (Connor et al., 2000), suggesting it can differentiate between social anxiety and other mental health conditions.

Treatment Sensitivity: Research shows the LSAS scores can decrease after successful treatment for social anxiety (Davidson et al., 2001), indicating its sensitivity to changes in social anxiety levels.

Reliability:
Internal Consistency: Studies report good internal consistency, with Cronbach's Alpha coefficients typically ranging from .80 to .90 (Baker et al., 2002; Stangier et al., 1999). This indicates the LSAS items measure a unified concept (likely social anxiety) consistently within the scale.

Test-Retest Reliability: Research shows moderate to high test-retest reliability coefficients, with correlations between administrations ranging from .70 to .80 (Connor et al., 2000). This suggests the LSAS produces relatively stable scores over short time periods.

Scoring:

Each item is rated on two 4-point Likert scales:
Fear: This measures the level of anxiety or fear experienced in the situation (0 = none, 1 = mild, 2 = moderate, 3 = severe).
Avoidance: This measure how often the situation is avoided due to anxiety (0 = never, 1 = occasionally, 2 = often, 3 = usually).
Total Score:
To calculate the total score, you need to sum the fear ratings for all 24 items.
Additionally, you can sum the avoidance ratings for a separate avoidance score.
Interpretation:
There's no official cut-off score for diagnosing social anxiety disorder (SAD) using the LSAS.
However, research suggests the following general guidelines:
30 or less: Social anxiety unlikely.
31-60: Possible social anxiety.
61-90: Probable social anxiety.
91 or more: Very severe social anxiety.

Data Analysis
In this study, the data was analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, which is widely used for its robust capabilities in handling complex data sets and performing various statistical analyses (Pallant, 2020). The analysis will involve several steps to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the relationships between perceived stress and emotional intelligence on social anxiety through descriptive statistics, correlational analysis, T-Test, multiple regression analysis.

Descriptive statistics in this study is used to summarize and analyse the demographic characteristics of the sample, such as gender, and age. This initial step is crucial for understanding the composition of the sample and provides a context for interpreting the results of subsequent analyses (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2016). Further, the demographic variables such as the gender and age are described using means, standard deviations, and frequencies. In addition, social anxiety and perceived stress levels are summarized using means and standard deviations to provide an overview of the data distribution. So, descriptive statistics offer a foundational insight into the data by summarizing the main features of the dataset in a manageable form (Trochim, Donnelly, & Arora, 2016).

The associations between social anxiety, perceived stress, and emotional intelligence were investigated using correlational analysis and Pearson's correlation coefficient. The degree and direction of the relationship between two continuous variables are measured by Pearson's correlation (Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2013). Furthermore, association analysis is taken into account in this study. Whether lower levels of social anxiety are linked to higher levels of emotional intelligence and perceived stress can be ascertained through relationship analysis. According to Field (2013), the correlation coefficient has a range of -1 to 1, with values nearer -1 signifying a strong negative association, values nearer 1 signifying a strong positive relationship, and values near 0 signifying no relationship. After adjusting for demographic factors including age, gender,

and institution, the predictive ability of emotional intelligence and felt stress on social anxiety was evaluated using multiple regression analysis. This method aids in determining the relative significance of each predictor variable in elucidating the variance in the criterion variable (Field, 2013).

RESULTS

Table 4.1: Distribution of Socio-Demographic Data

N = 198	n	%
Gender		
Male	101	51.0
Female	97	49.0
Institution		
Fuoye (**Ekiti North**)	74	37.4
Bouesti (**Ekiti South**)	50	25.25
FPA (**Ekiti Central**)	74	37.4

Socio-demographics profile of the respondents

According to this study, the sample recorded consists of 101 males (51.0%) and 97 females (49.0%). The number of valid responses obtained were 198 in total as well, which results to a total response rate of 100 %. This means there was no missing data as shown in the appendix II, while Table 1 shows the distribution of socio-demographic respondents' data for this research. Although the sample was not evenly distributed on institution basis as only 74 (37.4%) respondents were from Federal University Oye-Ekiti (FUOYE), 50 (25.25%) were from Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology (BOUESTI), while 74 (37.4%) were from Federal Polytechnic, Ado Ekiti (FPA).

Table 4.2. Descriptive statistics of perceived stress, emotional intelligence and social anxiety of the participants.

n=198

	Perceived Stress	Emotional Intelligence	Social Anxiety
Mean	20.2273	119.28	62.5556
Std. Deviation	5.39259	19.9476	20.19812

Testing of the Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

Perceived stress will serve as a predictor of social anxiety among undergraduates in Ekiti State.

1.   There will be a significant influence of perceived stress levels on social anxiety among young in Ekiti state.

Table 4.3: Independent t-test table showing influence of perceived stress on social anxiety

| | Perceived stress | | | | | |
| | High (n = 102) | | Low (n = 96) | | | |
	M	**SD**	**M**	**SD**	**t (196)**	**p**
Global Social anxiety	65.80	19.33	59.10	20.62	2.36	<.05

An independent t-test summary in table 3 above revealed that there is a significant influence of perceived stress on social anxiety t(196)= 2.360, p <.05. Specifically, this means that students who perceived being exposed to high stress (M = 65.80) reported greater social anxiety levels than students who perceived low stress (M = 59.10). Therefore, hypothesis one was supported.

2.   Perceived stress will be significantly associated with emotional intelligence among young adults in Ekiti State.

Table 4.4: Simple Linear Regression Analysis Showing the Association Between perceived stress and emotional intelligence

Model	B	**SEB**	B	**R**	R^2	**F**
Perceived stress	-.002	.02	-.008	.008	.001	.012

Table 4.4 showed that perceived stress was not significantly associated with emotional intelligence $F(1, 196) = 0.12$, p >.05. Therefore, hypothesis was not supported.

3.   Perceived stress will be significantly associated with sub-scales of social anxiety
Using simple linear regression, perceived stress was tested against sub-scales of social anxiety (this can be found in Appendix II), it was seen that there was no association with all but one sub-scale which is the avoidance of social interaction sub-scale.

Table 4.5: Simple Linear Regression Analysis Showing the association between stress and avoidance of social interaction

Model	B	SEB	B	R^2	R	F
Perceived Stress	0.25	.08	.22	.05	.22	9.91*

$p < .01$

Table 4.5 showed that perceived stress was significantly associated with avoidance of social interaction [F (1, 196) = 9.91, p < .01]. Specifically, an increase in perceived stress predicts an increase in avoidance of social interaction such that for each one unit increase in stress, avoidance of social situation increases by 0.25 units. Therefore, hypothesis was supported.

Hypothesis Two

Emotional intelligence will serve as a predictor of social anxiety levels among young adults in Ekiti State.

Table 4.6: Summary of multiple regression showing the independent and joint predictive influence of emotional intelligence dimensions on social anxiety

Predictors	β	t	P	R	R^2	F	P
Perception of emotion	0.14	1.30	>.05				
Managing own emotion	-.12	-1.08	>.05	.12	.02	.79	>.05
Managing others emotion	.02	0.17	>.05				
Utilization of emotion	.04	0.31	>.05				

Table 4.6 above showed that the perception of emotion (β = 0.14, t = 1.30, *p* >.05), managing own emotion (β = 0.12, t = -1.08, *p* >.05), managing others emotion (β = .02, t = 0.17, *p* >.05) and utilization (β = .04, t = 0.31, *p* >.05) dimensions of emotional intelligence neither independently nor jointly predict social anxiety R^2 = .02, F(4, 193) =. 79, *p* >.05. Thus, hypothesis two was not supported

Hypothesis 3

Perceived stress and Emotional intelligence will both serve as a predictor of social anxiety levels among young adults in Ekiti State.

1.   Emotional intelligence and stress will jointly predict social anxiety among undergraduates in Ekiti State

Table 4.7: Summary of multiple regression showing the joint predictive influence of emotional intelligence and stress on social anxiety

Predictors	β	t	P	R	R^2	F	P
Emotional intelligence	.06	0.89	>.05				
Perceived stress	0.15	2.12	<.05	.16	.03	2.64	>.05

Table 4.7 above showed that there is no significant joint influence of emotional intelligence and perceived stress on social anxiety among undergraduates R^2 = .03, F(2, 195) = 2.636, *p* >.05. Therefore, hypothesis 3 was not supported.

2. There will be a significant gender difference in social anxiety among young adults in Ekiti State.

Table 4.8: Independent t-test table showing gender differences in social anxiety

	Gender					
	Male (n = 101)		Female (n = 97)			
	M	SD	M	SD	t $_{(196)}$	*P*
Social anxiety	61.17	20.82	64	19.53	-.99	>.05

Table 4.8 revealed that there is no significant gender difference in social anxiety t(196)= -.99, *p* >.05. This implies that male and female students do not differ in the social anxiety levels. Thus, hypothesis is not supported.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In this study, there was no significant gender difference in social anxiety which is in line with recent research (Kahraman, 2022).

The Role of Perceived Stress among Undergraduates on Social Anxiety

In this study, the relationship between perceived stress and social anxiety was first examined. The results indicate that there is weak but a statistically significant negative correlation between perceived stress and social anxiety (r = .15, *p* < .05). This suggests that the higher students perceived stress, the lower their social anxiety level. There isn't a substantial body of research directly investigating the role perceived stress plays on social anxiety. Most studies tend to focus on the relationship between stress and anxiety which is not specific to this study.

This study also revealed that students who reported being exposed to high stress (M = 65.80) reported greater social anxiety levels than students who perceived low stress (M = 59.10).

One thing that stood out was testing perceived stress against sub-scales of social anxiety. Whilst perceived stress has a weak but significant negative correlation with social anxiety, it is different for a sub-scale of the social anxiety scale known as the avoidance of social interaction. Perceived stress was significantly associated with avoidance of social interaction [F (1, 196) = 9.91, p < .01]. Specifically, an increase in perceived stress predicts an increase in avoidance of social interaction such that for each one unit increase in stress, avoidance of social situation increases by 0.25 units. According to Dickerson and Kemeny (2004), social interactions can act as stressors, leading to negative outcomes such as social anxiety, avoidance, and isolation. They found that stress can significantly impact social interactions, impairing social functioning and mental health (Dickerson & Kemeny, 2004).

The Role of Emotional Intelligence among Undergraduates on Social Anxiety
The analysis showed that the perception of emotion (β = 0.14, t = 1.30, *p* >.05), managing own emotion (β = 0.12, t = -1.08, *p* >.05), managing others emotion (β = .02, t = 0.17, *p* >.05) and utilization (β = .04, t = 0.31, *p* >.05) dimensions of emotional intelligence neither independently nor jointly predict social anxiety R^2 = .02, F(4, 193) =. 79, *p* >.05. This goes contrary to numerous previous studies that examined the connection between social anxiety and emotional intelligence. In a study by Kahraman (2022) titled "Investigating the relationship between emotional intelligence and social anxiety levels of university students," it was shown that social anxiety was strongly predicted by emotional intelligence (F=21.033, R=.303, R²=.092, p<.05). This finding indicates that individuals' social anxiety lessens as their emotional intelligence rises. Together, the emotional intelligence scale's subscales were found to account for 12% of the variance in social anxiety. This finding indicates that individuals' social anxiety lessens as their emotional intelligence rises. Although in a study on emotions in social anxiety disorder, General emotion beliefs, by contrast, were only associated with perceived stress. None of the emotion belief scales were associated with fear and avoidance of social situations as indicated on the LSAS-SR (De Castella et al., 2014).

The role of perceived stress and emotional intelligence on social anxiety
In this study, perceived stress and emotional intelligence were tested to check if they jointly predict social anxiety. The analysis showed that there is no significant joint influence of emotional intelligence and perceived stress on social anxiety among undergraduates R^2 = .03, F(2, 195) = 2.636, *p* >.05.
The presence of contradictory results indicates the need to replicate emotional intelligence and Social anxiety in different settings with different study groups.

CONCLUSION
The findings from this study indicated that the respondents included a slightly higher number of males than females, and the distribution across institutions was uneven, with the least representation from BOUESTI students. The study also found a a weak but a statistically significant negative correlation between perceived stress and social anxiety. This suggests that an increase in perceived stress is associated with decreasing social anxiety. In addition, this study

revealed that no significant difference was found in social anxiety between male and female students, and it was noted across institutions used in this study.

It is also interesting to know that perceived stress was significantly associated with avoidance of social interaction. Specifically, an increase in perceived stress predicts an increase in avoidance of social interaction such that for each one unit increase in stress, avoidance of social situations increases by 0.25 units. This implies that social interactions can act as stressors, leading to negative outcomes such as social anxiety, avoidance, and isolation. Hence, stress can significantly impact social interactions, impairing social functioning and mental health.

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