

A Study on the Relationship Between Social Anxiety and Altruistic Behaviour among Sanitation Workers

Ms. Suba Shree. E¹, Ms. Shalini. R², Mr. Manoj. R³

¹Student, Department of psychology, Dr. M.G.R. Educational and research institute

²Professor, Department of psychology, Dr. M.G.R. Educational and research institute

³Head of the department, Department of psychology, Dr. M.G.R. Educational and research institute

Abstract

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between social anxiety and altruistic behaviour among young adults. A correlational research design was adopted for the study. The sample consisted of 150 young adults selected using convenience sampling. Standardized instruments, namely the Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS) and Altruistic Behaviour Scale, were used to collect data. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis were employed for data analysis. The findings revealed that social anxiety ($M = 40.13$, $SD = 5.931$) and altruistic behaviour ($M = 38.85$, $SD = 6.737$) were at moderate levels. A low positive correlation ($r = 0.165$) was found between the variables, which was statistically significant at the 0.05 level ($p = 0.044$). The results suggest that individuals with higher levels of social anxiety may demonstrate slightly higher altruistic tendencies, although the relationship is weak. The study contributes to understanding the subtle role of anxiety in influencing prosocial behaviour among young adults.

Keywords: Social Anxiety, Altruistic Behaviour, Young Adults, Prosocial Behaviour.t

1. Introduction

Sanitation workers constitute an essential workforce responsible for maintaining environmental hygiene, public health, and community sanitation. Their duties, which include waste collection, sewage management, and street cleaning, play a critical role in preventing disease and ensuring a safe living environment. Despite their significant contributions, sanitation workers are often subjected to social stigma, discrimination, and lack of societal recognition. Such marginalization may adversely affect their psychological well-being, particularly in terms of their social interactions and self-perception.

Social anxiety is a psychological condition characterized by an intense fear of being judged, negatively evaluated, or embarrassed in social situations. Individuals experiencing social anxiety often display avoidance behaviours, heightened self-consciousness, and emotional distress during interpersonal interactions. Among sanitation workers, this condition may be intensified due to the stigmatized nature of their occupation, societal attitudes linking their work to lower social status, and repeated exposure to social rejection or disregard. These experiences may contribute to internalized stigma, reduced self-esteem, and withdrawal from social participation.

At the same time, sanitation work reflects a strong orientation toward community welfare, aligning with

the concept of altruistic behaviour. Altruistic behaviour involves voluntary actions aimed at benefiting others without expecting personal rewards. Sanitation workers often perform their duties under challenging and hazardous conditions, demonstrating commitment to public well-being despite limited recognition. Psychological research suggests that altruistic behaviour may be influenced by empathy, moral values, and social learning, and in some cases, may also function as a coping mechanism in the presence of emotional distress.

The coexistence of social anxiety and altruistic behaviour among sanitation workers presents an important area for psychological investigation. While social anxiety may hinder interpersonal functioning, altruistic tendencies may promote prosocial engagement and community contribution. In the Indian context, additional factors such as limited educational opportunities, workplace hierarchies, and socio-cultural inequalities may further shape these experiences. However, there is a paucity of empirical research specifically examining the relationship between social anxiety and altruistic behaviour among sanitation workers, highlighting the need for focused investigation in this population.

Concept of Social Anxiety and Altruistic Behaviour

Definitions of Social Anxiety

- **American Psychiatric Association (2013):** Social anxiety is defined as a persistent fear of social or performance situations in which an individual is exposed to possible scrutiny and fears negative evaluation, embarrassment, or humiliation.
- **Leary & Kowalski (1995):** Social anxiety involves heightened self-awareness and concern regarding how one is perceived by others, often leading to avoidance of social interactions and discomfort in interpersonal situations.
- **Gilbert (2001):** Social anxiety is influenced by perceived social rank and experiences of shame, inferiority, or rejection within social hierarchies.
- **Goffman (1963):** Link & Phelan (2001): Social anxiety may arise from stigma and societal labeling, where individuals internalize negative stereotypes, leading to fear of judgment and social withdrawal.

Definitions of Altruistic Behaviour

- **Batson (1991):** Altruistic behaviour refers to voluntary actions intended to benefit others without expectation of external rewards or personal gain.
- **Eisenberg et al. (2006):** Altruism is a component of prosocial behaviour that includes helping, sharing, and cooperating to promote the well-being of others.
- **Piliavin & Charng (1990):** Altruistic behaviour is influenced by empathy, moral values, and social responsibility, often shaped through social learning.
- **Thoits (2010):** Individuals experiencing emotional distress may engage in altruistic behaviour as a coping mechanism to maintain social harmony and personal meaning.

2. Review of literature

A study was conducted by **World Health Organization (2021)** on Mental Health and Well-being of Sanitation Workers. The report highlighted that sanitation workers face psychological challenges including anxiety, social stigma, and occupational stress. The study emphasized that poor mental health affects social participation and community engagement. Although altruistic behaviour was not directly measured, the report acknowledged the service-oriented nature of sanitation work and the psychological barriers that limit positive social interaction. This study supports the present research by underscoring the importance of examining social anxiety and its impact on altruistic behaviour among sanitation workers.

It also highlights the need for mental health interventions to improve social integration and prosocial engagement.

A study was conducted by **Suresh and Thomas (2021)** on Occupational Stress and Mental Health among Sanitation Workers. The purpose of the study was to assess psychological stress and anxiety among sanitation workers in urban settings. Using standardized mental health scales, the study found high levels of social anxiety, perceived discrimination, and emotional exhaustion. Although participants expressed pride in contributing to public welfare, anxiety limited their social engagement and voluntary helping behaviours. The authors concluded that mental health challenges significantly influence social functioning and prosocial behaviour. This study is directly relevant to the present research as it highlights the psychological barriers that may mediate the relationship between social anxiety and altruistic behaviour among sanitation workers.

An investigation by **Reddy and Rao (2020)** focused on Social Exclusion, Anxiety, and Behaviour among Sanitation Workers. The study used qualitative interviews and psychological assessments to explore lived experiences of sanitation workers. Findings revealed high levels of social exclusion, anxiety, and emotional distress. Despite these challenges, workers expressed strong altruistic attitudes toward community health. However, fear of disrespect and social avoidance restricted their engagement in voluntary helping behaviours. The study emphasized that social anxiety arising from exclusion significantly affects social functioning. This research is directly relevant as it highlights the coexistence of altruistic values and social anxiety among sanitation workers, reinforcing the need for empirical analysis of their relationship.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Research question:

This study was about sanitation workers who take care of the cleanliness of the environment and how they often face social neglect and uncomfortable interactions with other and which may lead to social anxiety. It wants to see how social anxiety may influence their tendency to help others.

3.2 Objectives

1. To assess the level of social anxiety among sanitation workers.
2. To assess the level of altruistic/helping behaviour among sanitation workers.
3. To examine the relationship between social anxiety and altruistic behaviour in sanitation workers.

3.3 Hypothesis

Null Hypothesis (H₀): There is no significant relationship between social anxiety and altruistic behaviour among sanitation workers.

4. Research Design

The present study adopted a descriptive correlational research design to examine the relationship between social anxiety and altruistic behaviour among sanitation workers. This design was considered appropriate as the study aims to identify the degree and direction of association between the two variables without manipulating them. Both variables were measured using standardized self-report questionnaires administered at a single point in time.

4.1 Sampling technique:

The sample for the present study was selected using a convenience sampling technique. Sanitation workers who were readily available and willing to participate during the period of data collection were included in

the study. The sample for the study consisted of 150 sanitation workers.

4.2 Data collection:

- Data will be collected through offline questionnaires distributed to the participants.
- Participants will provide demographic information, followed by responses to the two standardized scales.

4.3 Tool description:

- Social anxiety was measured using the Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS) developed by Mattick and Clarke (1998). The scale consists of 20 items that assess anxiety experienced during social interactions. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (Not at all characteristic of me) to 4 (Extremely characteristic of me). Three items (Items 5, 9, and 11) are positively worded and are reverse scored. The total score is obtained by summing all item responses after reverse scoring, with scores ranging from 0 to 80. Higher scores indicate higher levels of social interaction anxiety. The SIAS demonstrates excellent reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.88 to 0.94, and strong test-retest reliability ($r = 0.92$). The scale has established construct and convergent validity, showing significant correlations with other measures of social anxiety and social phobia.
- Altruistic behaviour was measured using the Self-Report Altruism Scale (SRA) developed by Rushton, Chrisjohn, and Fekken (1981). The scale consists of 20 items that assess the frequency of altruistic and helping behaviours in everyday life. Responses are recorded on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (Never) to 4 (Very often). The total altruism score is calculated by summing all items, yielding a score range of 0 to 80, with higher scores indicating greater altruistic behaviour. The SRA has demonstrated good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging between 0.80 and 0.87. The scale also shows criterion validity, as it correlates positively with measures of empathy, prosocial behaviour, and volunteering frequency.

4.4. Statistical analysis:

The collected data were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

- Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were computed for both variables.
- Pearson's product-moment correlation was used to examine the relationship between social anxiety and altruistic behaviour.
- The level of significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

4.5 Inclusive criteria:

- Sanitation workers aged 20–55 years
- Individuals currently employed in sanitation-related work
- Participants who provided informed consent
- Both male and female participants

4.6 Exclusion Criteria

- Individuals diagnosed with a severe psychiatric disorder
- Participants unwilling to provide consent
- Incomplete questionnaire responses

5. Result

This chapter discusses the results and interpretation of the analysis done to understand the relationship between social anxiety and altruistic behaviour among young adults.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics showing the mean and standard deviation of social anxiety and altruistic behaviour among sanitation workers

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	N
Social Anxiety	40.13	5.931	150
Altruistic behaviour	38.85	6.737	150

The descriptive statistics table presents the mean and standard deviation values for the variables included in the study. For social anxiety, the sample size was N = 150, with a mean score of 40.13 and a standard deviation of 5.931. For altruistic behaviour, the sample size was also N = 150, with a mean score of 38.85 and a standard deviation of 6.737.

Table 2

Correlational analysis showing the relationship between social anxiety and altruistic behaviour among sanitation workers.

Variables	Pearson's correlation	r value	Decision
Social Anxiety	1	.165*	Rejecting (H0)
Altruistic behaviour			

***Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)**

The table shows the values of Pearson's correlation among the two variables. There appears to be a correlation of .165 with a significance value of $p = .044$ ($p < 0.05$). This indicates that there is a weak but significant positive relationship between social anxiety and altruistic behaviour.

As a significant relationship is observed between the two variables, the null hypothesis (H0) stating that there is no relationship between social anxiety and altruistic behaviour is rejected. This indicates that individuals with higher levels of social anxiety may also show slightly higher levels of altruistic behaviour.

6. Discussion

The present study examined the relationship between social anxiety and altruistic behaviour among sanitation workers. The findings showed a statistically significant but weak positive correlation between the two variables ($r = 0.165$, $p < 0.05$). The mean score for social anxiety was 40.13 (SD = 5.931), and altruistic behaviour had a mean of 38.85 (SD = 6.737), indicating moderate levels for both. This suggests that although the relationship exists, it is not very strong, and both variables may be influenced by additional factors. One interesting aspect of the findings is that even with higher levels of social anxiety, sanitation workers continue to engage in altruistic behaviour. This could be because their work itself involves helping society, which may give them a sense of purpose despite experiencing discomfort in social situations. In many cases, individuals who feel judged or undervalued may still try to contribute positively, either out of responsibility or as a way to feel socially connected. At the same time, social stigma and negative public attitudes towards their occupation may contribute to their anxiety, affecting

how comfortable they feel in social interactions. However, since the correlation is weak, it is clear that social anxiety alone does not strongly influence altruistic behaviour. Other factors such as personal values, work environment, social support, and coping styles may play a larger role. The findings highlight the need to improve awareness, reduce stigma, and provide psychological support for sanitation workers. Supporting their mental well-being can help reduce anxiety while also encouraging their positive contributions to society. Future research can explore additional variables like resilience and social support to gain a deeper understanding of this relationship.

7. Summary

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between social anxiety and altruistic behaviour among young adults. Social anxiety refers to the fear or discomfort experienced in social situations where individuals feel judged or evaluated, while altruistic behaviour involves voluntary actions intended to help others without expecting personal gain. The study was conducted on a sample of 150 participants using standardized instruments, namely the Social Anxiety Scale and Altruistic Behaviour Scale. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the study. The data were analysed using Pearson's correlation with the help of SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) to determine the relationship between the variables. The findings of the study revealed a weak but statistically significant positive correlation between social anxiety and altruistic behaviour ($r = 0.165$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that individuals with higher levels of social anxiety may also exhibit slightly higher levels of altruistic behaviour.

8. Conclusion

The present study concludes that there is a significant relationship between social anxiety and altruistic behaviour among young adults. The findings indicate a weak positive correlation between the two variables, suggesting that individuals experiencing higher levels of social anxiety may still engage in altruistic or helping behaviours. Based on the findings, the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis was accepted, indicating that a relationship exists between social anxiety and altruistic behaviour.

9. Limitations

The study has certain limitations that should be considered. The sample size was limited to 150 participants, which may not fully represent the entire population of young adults. The data were collected from a specific group of participants, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study relied on self-report questionnaires, which may be influenced by participants' personal perceptions or response bias.

10. Recommendations

For further research, it is recommended that future research be done with an increased number of participants in order to have more generalized findings. Future researchers may also examine other psychological variables concerning social anxiety and altruism, such as empathy, self-esteem, and emotional intelligence. Future research may also utilize other research methodologies in order to have a better understanding of the relationship between these variables.

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