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## The Mitigation of Avoidant Personality Disorder by dint of Self Esteem and Social Anxiety among Stutterers

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Stuttering is a speech disorder that causes repeated speech problems that make it hard to communicate. It has adverse effects on a stutterer's self-esteem and personality. This study looked at a personality disorder called "avoidant personality disorder." This is a pattern of avoiding social situations, feeling like you're not good enough, and being overly sensitive to criticism (APA, 2013, p. 662). The purpose of this research was to examine the influence of self-esteem and social anxiety as predictors of avoidant personality disorder in people who stammer.

**Methods:** In this research, 100 persons between the ages of 18 and 30 who stammer participated. The respondents completed the Personality Diagnostic Questionnaire-4, the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale, and the Social Anxiety Interaction Scale.

**Results:** In results, it was revealed that self-esteem negatively predicted avoidant personality disorder. However, social anxiety positively predicted avoidant personality disorder. Self-esteem has found to have a negative relationship with social anxiety and avoidant personality disorder.

**Conclusions:** The study is an important addition to the existing body of knowledge on the role of self-esteem and social anxiety in the prediction and mitigation of avoidant personality disorder among stutterers.

**Keywords:** *Stutterers; Avoidant Personality Disorder; Self-Esteem; Social Anxiety*

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## Introduction

Stuttering is a kind of speech impairment characterised by recurrent speech abnormalities that impair one's ability to communicate effectively. Bloodstein & Bernstein-Ratner (2008) estimated 1% of people in general around the globe have stutter and the incidences of stuttering are 4 to 5 percent in one's life. When children are between the ages of two and five, they begin to stutter (Yairi et al., 1996). Stuttering has several long-term effects that make stutterers more prone to psychological and social issues (Schneier et al., 1997). People who stammer have said that their stuttering has had negative repercussions on their scholastic life as well as long-lasting social and emotional consequences for them in the past (Hayhow et al., 2002). Adults who stutter often get negative reactions and assumptions from others, and they often have a hard time getting jobs or going to school (Blumgart et al., 2010; Klein & Hood, 2004).

Stuttering has also been linked to certain personality traits, such as excessive neuroticism, as well as mental illnesses (Iverach et al., 2010). The study conducted by Iverach et al. (2009) found in their research that the development of personality problems and mental diseases is linked to stuttering. In the 5th edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, avoidant personality disorder (APD) is classified as a personality disorder associated with fear and anxiety (APA, 2013). APA (2013, p. 662) says that people with APD have a "consistent pattern of social restraint, inadequacy, and hypersensitivity to negative evaluation."

As described by the American Psychological Association, social anxiety disorder is a severe fear of social situations in which the person is assessed, criticized, and judged by others (APA, 2013), and it is the most prevalent disorder (Ruscio et al., 2008). Speaking in front of an audience, talking with strangers, and conversing with government authorities are all situations that are often anticipated (Ballenger et al., 1998). People who stammer tend to avoid situations that are socially challenging because they believe it will heighten their anxiety and timidity even more (Mahr & Torosian, 1999). As a result, stutterers often suffer anxiety over the possibility of being socially harmed (Plexico et al., 2009). From the increasing number of cases, it is clear that stuttering may be linked to certain aspects of social anxiety, and this may preserve the nature of social anxiety (Lowe et al., 2012).

A person's entire feeling of self-worth and personal value might be defined as "self-esteem." (Rosenberg, 1965). Numerous studies have focused on the association between stuttering and self-esteem (Adriaensens et al., 2015; Yovetich et al., 2000). Bullied students, both stutterers and non-stutterers, have poor self-esteem (Berger, 2007; Smith & Monks, 2008). Children who stammer are expected to acquire poor self-esteem as a result of unfavourable reactions from others during

interactions (Adriaensens et al., 2015; Zuckner, 2011). People who stammer avoid situations that need them to speak since doing so causes them anxiety (Kalinowski et al., 1993).

Adolescence's onset of personality disorders and their related patterns of behaviour tend to persist into adulthood (Clark, 2009). People with personality disorders are seen as having a lower probability of recovery (Domsch et al., 2008). Adult stutterers should be evaluated for signs of mental illness and personality problems as part of their treatment plan in order to maximise their chances of successful recovery. As a result, stutterers' personality abnormalities must be carefully evaluated. Personality problems are often linked to a worse quality of life (Dimaggio & Norcross, 2008).

The goal of this research was to see whether the scores on self-esteem and social anxiety predict increase or decrease in avoidant personality traits. As a result, it was anticipated that stutterers who score high on self-esteem and score low on social anxiety would help reduce the risk of having an avoidant personality disorder features by scoring low. Based on the literature review, three hypotheses were formulated. First, a high score on self-esteem would negatively predict the score on avoidant personality disorder. Second, the score on social anxiety would positively predict increase in the score on avoidant personality disorder. Finally, there would be negative relationship between self-esteem and social anxiety and avoidant personality disorder.

## Method

### *Sample*

A total of N = 100 stutterers were chosen for the study. It was agreed that they would be between the ages of 18 and 30. Stutterers in this age range were sought for by using the purposive sampling technique. The age range reported by the 100 respondents to the demographics questionnaire was between 18 and 30 years old ( $M = 24.99$ ,  $SD = 4.10$ ). There were 22 female participants and 78 male ones. The bulk of the participants (76) stated that they were single, with only 24 stating that they were married. Based on their level of education, 38 of the participants were undergraduates, 39 were graduates, and 23 were post-graduates.

### *Procedure and Measures*

All methods involving human subjects in this research were given the green light by the university's ethics board. Ethical norms of both national and institutional research committees are strictly adhered to in this investigation.

Speech pathology clinics in Peshawar were used to get in touch with the 100 people who stutter. Adults who stutter were included in this study. Additionally, they were asked to refer to people they were aware were stutterers. Following that, participants were told of the purpose of the study, and

their informed consent was acquired. As a result, they were given all of the questionnaires for this research to complete. The participants were then thanked for completing the surveys thoroughly. The data was gathered and arranged in this order. Finally, data preparation for statistical analysis was performed.

Participants are asked to reply to 20 items on the *Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS)* created by Mattick and Clarke (1998), with responses ranging from 0 to 4, with 0 representing the lack of traits. It is hoped that the self-declaration questions will help participants think about how they feel when they meet new people e.g. "I have difficulty talking with other people". SIAS has a score range of 0 to 80. Several respondents reported having significant levels of anxiety during the meeting with other individuals. The Cronbach alpha value of the SIAS indicated in this study was sufficiently reliable. 90.

The participants' self-esteem was assessed using a 10-item *Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)*, with five positive e.g. "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself", and five negative questions e.g. "I certainly feel useless at times", measuring how one feels about oneself, its value, and acceptance. Each item was rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = strongly agree). Answers are totaled to get a self-esteem rating; higher scores indicate stronger self-esteem. The SES has good psychometric qualities (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Rosenberg, 1965), internal accuracy of .74-.80 (Macan et al., 1990), and two-week test-retest reliability (Silber & Tippett, 1965). However, in this study, reliability for this scale was reported as  $\alpha = .87$ .

The symptoms of avoidant personality disorder (APD) in individuals who stammer were assessed using questions from the *Personality Diagnostic Questionnaire-4 (PDQ-4)*, which was developed by Bagby and Farvolden (2003). The PDQ-4 consisted of 99 questions, with true-false choices for each item indicating whether or not a symptom was present or absent e.g. "I avoid working with others who may criticize me". Self-report inventories evaluating the 10 personality disorders listed in DSM-V were used to develop this instrument (APA, 2013). Only the elements that were connected to avoidant personality disorder were used in this investigation. The correlation coefficient alpha for the seven items assessing APD symptoms was .69.

## Results

The data was analyzed based on proposed hypotheses of the study. To find out how scores on self-esteem and social anxiety predict variation in the scores avoidant personality disorder, a regression analysis was performed. To assess the relation among self-esteem, social anxiety, and avoidant personality features, a Pearson product correlation was carried out.

The findings of analyses that looked at participants' (stutterers') levels of social anxiety and self-esteem in the context of an avoidant personality disorder. SPSS was used to do the essential analyses in this study to analyse and explore the research aims and hypotheses. The findings are grouped according to the study's hypothesis. In this study, different statistical tests were used to check the hypotheses and figure out what the results were.

The scales that were used in this research were subjected to a psychometric analysis, which consisted of determining the mean score in addition to its standard deviation, range, and Cronbach's. The psychometric features of the measures are outlined in detail in table 1.

Scale	M	SD	Rang	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Rosenberg Self-Esteem	20.13	3.41	14-29	.87
Social Interaction Anxiety	46.3	5.73	35-57	.90
The Personality Diagnostic Questionnaire	4.58	1.9	1-7	.69

Table 1 - Psychometric Properties for RSE, SIA and PDQ-4

Table 2 demonstrates the psychometric qualities of the measures (scales) used in this investigation. The Rosenberg Self Esteem scale Cronbach's alpha rating of 0.87 indicated a good level of internal consistency. Similarly, the Social Interaction Anxiety scale has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.90 (<.70), indicating strong internal consistency. However, the internal consistency for the Personality Diagnostic Questionnaire-4 was .69, which is satisfactory, however below high.

The first hypothesis mentioned that a high score on self-esteem would negatively predict the score on avoidant personality disorder. A linear regression analysis was also carried out in order to verify the third hypothesis. According to the findings, which are shown in table 3, the results demonstrated that high self-esteem substantially and adversely predicted avoidant personality disorder scores,  $F(1, 98) = 98.10, p < .05$ . Furthermore, when self-esteem accounted for 50% of the variation in the findings of the study on avoidant personality disorder, the value of  $R^2$  was .50. One unit improvement in self-esteem was associated with a nearly one standard deviation,  $\beta = -.70$  reduction in the severity of symptoms associated with avoidant personality disorder.

Variable	B	SE	t	p	95% CI
Constant	12.419	.803	15.474	.000	[10.906, 14.020]
Self Esteem	-.389	.039	-9.905	.000	[-.453, -.330]

Note. CI = Confidence interval

Table 2 - Regression Analysis for Self Esteem Predicting Avoidant Personality Disorder

It can be understood with the help of figure 1, which shows that the slope of the regression line is down, indicating a negative relationship and predicting that a rise in self-esteem would make it less likely to do well on the avoidant personality disorder test.

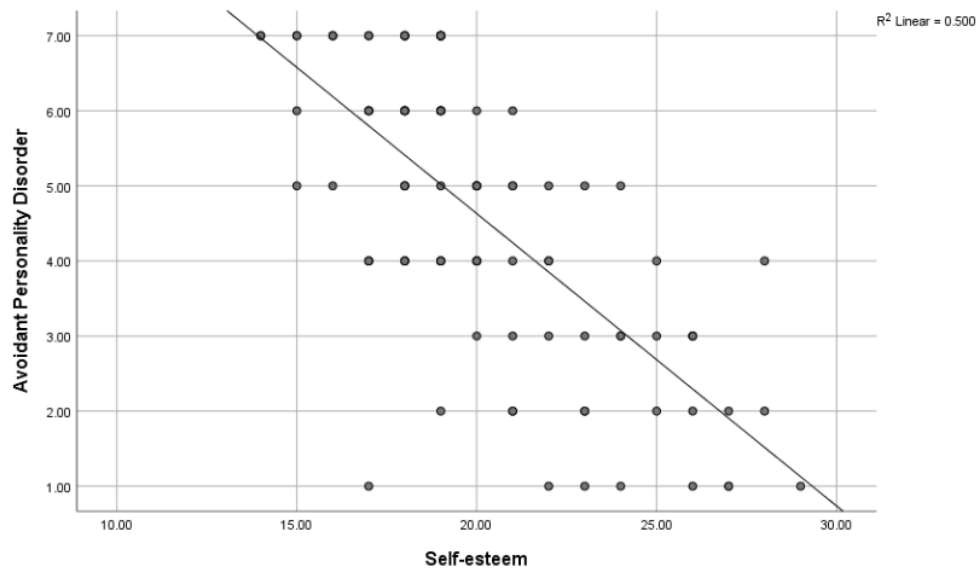


Figure 1 - Regression Analysis Graph for Avoidant Personality and Self Esteem

The second hypothesis stated that the score on social anxiety would positively predict increase in the score on avoidant personality disorder. This hypothesis was tested using linear regression, and the results illustrated that the predictor explained 38 percent of the variance in the score on the avoidant personality test with  $[F(1,98) = 62.23; p < .05]$ . In addition, the results demonstrated that social anxiety substantially and favourably predicted avoidant personality disorder ( $\beta = .623, p < 0.05$ ), as shown in table 3. Aside from this, for every unit of rise in social anxiety, there is a .62 point increase in the score for avoidant personality.

Variable	B	SE	t	p	95% CI
Constant	-4.859	1.206	-4.030	.000	[-6.982, -2.688]
Social Anxiety	.204	.026	7.888	.000	[.156, .251]

Note. CI = Confidence interval

Table 3 - Regression Analysis for Social Anxiety Predicting Avoidant Personality Disorder

As can be seen in figure 2, the slope of the regression line is upward. This means that there is a positive relationship, since the line is going up, which means that a higher score on the social anxiety measure predicts a higher score on the avoidant personality disorder measure.

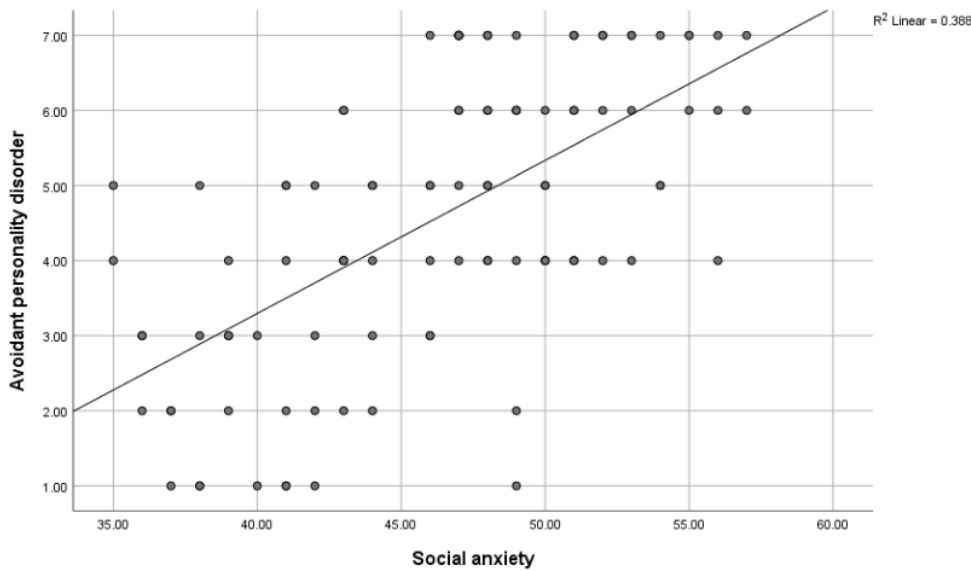


Figure 2 - Regression Analysis Graph for Avoidant Personality Disorder and Social Anxiety

The final hypothesis described that self-esteem would be negatively correlated with social anxiety and avoidant personality disorder. As a consequence of this, a Pearson product correlation indicated a substantial negative association between self-esteem and avoidant personality disorder [ $r = -.707$ ;  $p < .05$ ], and self-esteem and social anxiety [ $r = -.87$ ;  $p < .05$ ]. Nevertheless, the findings indicated a positive association between social anxiety and avoidant personality disorder [ $r = .62$ ;  $p < .05$ ]. As a result, self-esteem was shown to have a negative link with avoidant personality disorder and social anxiety, but high social anxiety was found to have a positive relationship with the avoidant personality disorder. Refer to table 4.

Variable	APD	SE
Avoidant Personality Disorder	---	---
Self Esteem	-.707**	---
Social Anxiety	.62*	-.87**

Note. The results for the correlation among Avoidant Personality Disorder, Self Esteem, and Social Anxiety. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

Table 4 - Correlation among APD, SA, and SE

### Discussion

According to this research, a high score on self-esteem would negatively predict the score on avoidant personality disorder. Thus, the outcomes of this research corroborated the expectations, revealing that

people who stammer reported high self-esteem and scored low on avoidant personality disorder. This link was shown to be negative. In addition, avoidant personality disorder symptoms were fewer in individuals who had scored high on self-esteem. Stuttering people who have low self-esteem are more likely to suffer from avoidant personality disorder. It is possible that this negative forecast and the link between self-esteem and avoidant personality disorder may come from certain characteristics of APD. There may be a link between APD and poor self-esteem since the person in APD is more vulnerable to criticism and evaluation in social contexts, as in the research of APD (Bajina, 1995). As a consequence of their speech impairment, people who stutter may acquire a variety of covert behaviors like a poor self-image, which may be a reflection of how others see them, which may or may not be related to their personality or coping mechanisms for dealing with life's challenges (Bajina, 1995).

These results show consistency with the study of Bajina (1995). In his study, stutterers were compared to non-stutterers. The self-esteem of stutterers was considerably lower than that of non-stutterers in the study. Many PD features, including preventive, borderline, dependent, and obsessive-compulsive behaviors, are strongly linked to a person's self-esteem, according to two studies in student samples that looked at this issue in depth (Sinha & Watson, 1997; Watson, 1998). Self-conscious and extremely contemplative, evading people typically see themselves as separate from the rest of the population (Millon, 1969). Unaware of their own personality and value, these people perceive themselves as inept or inferior to other people. As a consequence of APD individuals' inability to meet their interpersonal objectives, they may suffer from poor self-esteem. Watson (1998), however, found a more substantial association between self-esteem and APD features than BPD qualities when the changes were minor. But, even though low self-esteem was a clear sign of APD in the DSM-III (APA, 1980), it was taken out of the DSM-III-R (APA, 1987), but it was put back in the DSM-IV (APA, 1994) with a slightly different wording: that they think they are incompetent, ugly, or less important than other people. It's possible to think about APD as a "disorder of low self-esteem," a term that is acquiring scientific support (Meyer, 2002; Sinha & Watson, 1997; Watson, 1998). Particularly, inadequacies, social incapacity, inferiority, and a general loss of self-esteem are expressed by APD patients (APA 1994; 2011), and lack of self-esteem in general (Lynum et al., 2008).

As predicted, social anxiety would increase the likelihood of developing avoidant personality disorder. The findings of this research demonstrate that social anxiety is a strong predictor of an increase in the number of avoidant personality disorder symptoms, accounting for 38% of the variation among people who stammer. Increased social anxiety increases the likelihood of adults who

stammer developing an avoidant personality disorder. Also, there was a small but positive link between social anxiety and the number of avoidant personality disorder traits in adults who stutter. These findings are consistent with those of Hofmann et al. (1995), who found that almost 80% of those with social phobia had APD as well. As a result, avoidant personality disorder and social anxiety are common both in clinical and non-clinical populations (Cox et al., 2009; Hummelen, et al., 2007). Avoidant, schizoid, and schizotypal personality disorders are all characterised by high levels of social anxiety and difficulty forming close relationships. As a result, these people's emotional, social, and close-relationship lives are disrupted (LaFreniere, 2009). APD was more strongly linked to SP than to other personality disorders, whereas APD was more strongly linked to SP than to other symptom disorders. Stuttering and tremors have been linked to social anxiety, according to George and Lydiard (1994).

### **Conclusions**

As the main goal of most speech therapists and speech pathologists is to treat speech disorders, they tend to ignore psychological problems like social anxiety and low self-esteem that people with speech problems like stuttering face. These problems have a big impact on how well speech disorders are treated and how bad they are. This study showed how important avoidant personality disorder and social anxiety are, as well as how they relate to self-esteem. The results of this study could help speech pathologists and speech therapists figure out if stutterers have avoidant personality disorders, social anxiety disorders, and a low sense of self-worth. This study also shows how self-esteem can help people with social anxiety and avoidant personality disorder. So, when treating an individual with a speech disorder, clinicians should be shown how important self-esteem is and how it can prevent APD and social anxiety from developing in stutterers. This could lead to better treatment results. For better treatment results, it is very important to find and diagnose APD, social anxiety, and low self-esteem in people who stutter.

First and foremost, the study's  $n = 100$  sample size was tiny. As a consequence, the findings can't be extrapolated to other situations. A second problem with this research is that it relied on purposive sampling, which has a poor degree of dependability and makes it difficult to extrapolate the results to a broader population. Third, the research did not include an equal number of men and women or a certain age range. Fourthly, a few of the individuals had previously sought counselling services. Fifth, no comparison was made between the stutterer and non-stutterer groups in this research. Finally, this study is cross-sectional in nature, however it would better using experimental design.

Based on the explanation of limits, ideas for further study are clear. This research would be used in a clinical environment if it were to be put into action. Speech therapists for stammering should take these findings into account when working with individuals who suffer from avoidant personality

disorder and social anxiety. Other personality problems connected with low self-esteem and social anxiety among stutterers should be studied further. Furthermore, it is important to compare stutterers and non-stutterers in two independent groups by employing experimental design. Studies should include people who stutter but are not getting help or who are not well educated.

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**Declaration of Interest statement:** none

**Authors' contribution:** The authors approved their equal contribution and this manuscript.

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