



Portrait of Social Anxiety Among Muslim Adolescent in Malang City

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 22 July 2024

Accepted 7 November 2024

Available online 4 December
2024

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DOI:

[10.18326/pamomong.v5i2.2211](https://doi.org/10.18326/pamomong.v5i2.2211)

How to cite:

Najich, M. A., Rahman, D. H.,
Atmoko, A., Kaserero, S.,
Dewanti, S. R. (2024). Portrait of
Social Anxiety Among Muslim
Adolescent in Malang

City. *Pamomong: Journal of
Islamic Educational*

Counseling, 5(2), 146–158.

<https://doi.org/10.18326/pamomong.v5i2.2211>

ABSTRACT

Social anxiety is common among high school students, impacting their development. This study examines students social anxiety prevalence in Malang, Indonesia. Using a quantitative descriptive survey method, data were collected from 346 students through cluster random sampling. A social anxiety scale based on La Grace's theory was employed to explore in which aspect students social anxiety. The survey revealed that beliefs in negative assessments (37%) were the highest, followed by social avoidance of new situations (36%) and general social avoidance (27%). Overall, social anxiety in this group is moderate. This study discuss that embedding Islamic and cultural values to address student's social anxiety may provide effective support for Guidance and Counseling services. Future research should investigate specific values for interventions and consider longitudinal studies to understand their long-term effects.

Keywords: Social Anxiety; Adolescents; Islam; Culture

ABSTRAK

Kecemasan sosial umum terjadi pada siswa sekolah menengah dan berdampak pada perkembangan mereka. Penelitian ini mengkaji prevalensi kecemasan sosial di Kota Malang. Dengan metode survei deskriptif kuantitatif, data dikumpulkan dari 346 siswa melalui *cluster random sampling*. Skala kecemasan sosial berdasarkan teori La Grace menunjukkan bahwa keyakinan terhadap penilaian negatif (37%) merupakan yang tertinggi, diikuti penghindaran sosial terhadap situasi baru (36%) dan penghindaran sosial umum (27%). Secara keseluruhan, kecemasan sosial dalam kelompok ini berada pada tingkat sedang. Penelitian ini mendiskusikan nilai-nilai Islam dan budaya dapat memberikan dukungan efektif bagi layanan

Bimbingan dan Konseling. Penelitian selanjutnya disarankan untuk meneliti nilai-nilai spesifik yang dapat digunakan dalam intervensi serta mempertimbangkan studi longitudinal untuk memahami efek jangka panjangnya.

Kata kunci: Kecemasan Sosial; Remaja; Islam; Budaya

INTRODUCTION

Social anxiety is an intense fear of negative evaluation in social situations, leading to significant distress (APA, 2013). In 2020, data showed that 18.8% of adolescents in Indonesia experienced social anxiety (Hardiyanto & Lathifah, 2020). Research by Vriends et al. (2013) shows that 15.8% of 311 Indonesians reported experiencing social anxiety disorder which aligns with a previous study that reported most 90% of late adolescents, around the age of 23, feel lonely and experience increased symptoms of social anxiety (Yustika & Istiqomah, 2022). Additionally, research found that the Covid-19 pandemic caused anxiety for Indonesian women (Dewanti, 2021). This anxiety often appears in some form, such as just talking in certain situations, with the figure reaching 70% (Yilmaz & Dilbaz, 2016). Research revealed that during the early stages of adolescence, usually by age 10, there was a 9.6% increase in the manifestation of social anxiety in the seven countries (Miers et al., 2013). Further, Individuals with lower levels of education and socioeconomic conditions are more likely to experience social anxiety disorder (Arditte Hall et al., 2020). Studies also found that social anxiety is common in children and adolescents (Rapee et al., 2023; Leigh & Clark, 2018; Pilkionienė et al., 2021).

Social anxiety can have a significant impact on students' functioning in school. Studies have found that social anxiety is closely associated with poorer social and leadership skills, increased attention difficulties, and more learning problems at school (Bernstein et al., 2018; Scharfstein et al., 2011). Additionally, research has also found that social anxiety can lead to students leaving school prematurely (Van Ameringen et al., 2004), being bullied (Antoniadou et al., 2019; Dumas & Midgett, 2021), and even attempting suicide (Buckner et al., 2017; Gallagher et al., 2014).

Despite many scientific suggestions on the impact of social anxiety on adolescents' functioning in school, research on this topic is minimal, especially in Indonesia. Research on social anxiety conducted in Indonesia mostly explored the correlation between social

anxiety and social media (Akbar & Faryansyah, 2018; Azka et al., 2018; Soliha, 2015). Other studies on social anxiety more focused on the psychological treatments related to self-esteem and self-acceptance (Fitri et al., 2024; Tobing, 2024; Wardhana & Rokhmah, 2024). This study aims to investigate the level of social anxiety of students in Malang, Indonesia. The findings of this study will provide significant information about students' social anxiety that will be helpful in planning and designing follow-up activities to address students' social anxiety in school.

METHODS

This study employs a non-experimental design utilizing a quantitative descriptive survey method. The descriptive survey method is a form of quantitative research aimed at systematically and factually describing the characteristics or phenomena present within a population (Dillman et al., 2014). The subjects of this research are students from both public and private high schools in Malang City, East Java Province. Malang City was selected for this study due to its status as an educational hub, with an estimated population of around twenty thousand high school students (BPS, 2023).

The sampling method applied is cluster random sampling (Creswell, 2014). The procedure for implementing this cluster random sampling technique in this study includes: (1) identifying the population and categorizing it based on public and private high schools in Malang City, (2) dividing the population into 30 clusters of high schools, (3) randomly selecting schools from each area with the help of a generator to choose 2 schools per cluster, and (4) collecting data from all members within the selected clusters.

In the process of population selection, three out of five sub-districts in Malang City were chosen, as two sub-districts lacked public high schools and did not meet the research criteria. The total population considered consists of 3,346 students, both boys and girls. According to the Krejcie and Morgan table, with a total population of 3,346, a sample size of 346 muslim students from the three selected sub-districts is required for this study. The distribution of students across the schools is as follows: Schools A, B, and C each have 64 students, while School D has 58 students and School E has 56 students. School F has the smallest enrollment, with just 40 students. In total, the sample consisted of 346 students with the criteria of being 15-18 years old, male and female, and Muslim.

The data collection technique employed in this study utilized a social anxiety scale developed by researchers based on Grace and Lopez's (1998). The indicators examined include (a) belief in negative evaluation, (b) social avoidance in new situations, and (c) general social avoidance. The social anxiety scale comprises 30 statements rated on a Likert scale. For data analysis, a descriptive approach is applied, aiming to elucidate the patterns and levels of social anxiety among high school students in Malang City. This descriptive analysis breaks down the data according to three criteria of statistical measurement. It is assumed that the values of the subjects within the population follow a normal distribution (Azwar, 2015).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher collected data from 346 students, providing an overview of social anxiety across six schools in Malang City: School A (64 students), School B (64 students), School C (64 students), School D (58 students), School E (56 students), and School F (40 students). The findings regarding the social anxiety profiles of high school students in Malang City.

Table 1 indicates that the average level of social anxiety among high school students in Malang City is 83.82, with a median of 83.00, a mode of 78, and a standard deviation of 6.614. The minimum score recorded for social anxiety is 70, while the maximum score reaches 102. Analyzing a sample of 346 high school students in Malang City reveals that 77 students (22%) fall into the category of high social anxiety, 230 students (66%) are classified as having moderate social anxiety, and 39 students (11%) are categorized as having low social anxiety. Therefore, it can be concluded that the majority of high school students in Malang City experience moderate social anxiety.

The results of data analysis using social anxiety instruments indicate several key factors: (a) the belief in negative evaluation, (b) social avoidance in new situations, and (c) general social avoidance. The findings suggest that the primary contributor to social anxiety among high school students in Malang City is the belief in negative evaluation (37%). This is closely followed by social avoidance in new situations at 36% and general social avoidance at 27%. Creed and Funder (1998) propose that excessive self-awareness of one's shortcomings and abilities is a significant factor in social anxiety, as it cultivates a fear of

personal evaluation. The impact of past experiences, especially from parents or carers, can explain how young learners are worried about being judged. As neurobiology explains, those past experiences build internal catalogues that influence individual self-awareness and how they expect the world. Individuals who live within a positive attachment have more positive internal catalogues, which means they will see people more positively, too, and vice versa (Perry & Dobson, 2013; Perry et al., 1995).

This fear of being judged can intensify social anxiety, particularly in contexts where individuals feel vulnerable to assessment by others. Cavanaugh and Buehler (2016) highlight several risk factors for anxiety, including hostile parenting and parental stress, which can significantly contribute to the development of anxiety disorders. Again this explanation, underscores the impact of past experiences, especially inadequate parenting and parental pressure, on an individual's psychological state, particularly regarding academic expectations.

At the core of social anxiety is the fear of negative evaluation; individuals often experience discomfort when faced with criticism or feedback that could threaten their self-esteem. Calvete et al. (2013) further elaborate that social anxiety is shaped by various elements, including self-awareness, emotional distress, and the apprehension of social evaluation, particularly when individuals doubt their ability to maintain a positive image. Social anxiety, characterized by concerns about negative evaluation and social avoidance in both new and familiar settings, can be significantly influenced by cultural factors. This phenomenon exhibits distinct traits within Javanese culture, particularly among high school students in Malang City. Key cultural values—such as shame, social harmony, and the concept of *ewuh pakewuh* (a sense of discomfort or hesitation stemming from social obligations)—play a crucial role. Adolescents in Malang often worry about being negatively assessed by others, especially in a social environment that prioritises harmony and proper conduct, referred to as *unggah-ungguh* (well-behaved). Upholding politeness and avoiding conflict are fundamental values in this cultural context. Consequently, students who feel unable to meet societal expectations or cultural norms may become more prone to social anxiety.

Anxiety often intensifies in new settings, such as social gatherings or school environments. Rigid social norms exert pressure on individuals to project an ideal self-

image. In these situations, those with social anxiety frequently avoid interactions, driven by a fear of judgment or an inability to conform to prevailing cultural standards. In cultures that prioritize social harmony and connectedness, individuals are expected to maintain a specific appearance and behavior in public (Irawanto et al., 2011; Supriyadi et al., 2012). As a result, those who are anxious about being evaluated may choose to withdraw from or completely avoid social situations.

Additionally, Javanese cultural concepts such as *rukun* (harmony) and *tepo seliro* (empathy towards others' feelings) can significantly aid in reducing stigma for students facing social anxiety. By cultivating values of tolerance and empathy in family and school settings, students may feel more accepted and comfortable (Hofmann & Hinton, 2014). Rachmawaty (2015) outlined several indicators of social anxiety disorder, which include an exaggerated perception of oneself in both positive and negative contexts, an irrational fear of judgment from others, difficulty speaking when feeling anxious, excessive sweating, and a rapid heartbeat. In more severe instances, individuals may exhibit a reluctance to leave their homes or participate in social situations, which are common characteristics of social phobia. Research conducted by Chen et al. (2014) highlights that social anxiety is particularly prevalent in collectivist societies, such as Indonesia, where there is a heightened concern about others' judgments and the preservation of social reputation. Additionally, Brody et al. (2016) suggest that rigid gender roles can intensify social anxiety, especially for those who perceive themselves as not conforming to societal expectations regarding gender.

Table 1

Profile of Social Anxiety of High School Students in Malang City

	M	SD	Lower	Upper	Interval	N	%
Sosial Anxiety	83.82	6.61	70	102		346	
Sosial Anxiety Category							
High					$X > 89$	77	22%
Medium					$80 < x \leq 89$	230	66%
Low					$78 < x < 80$	39	11%
Sosial Anxiety Indicator							
Belief in negative evaluation						128	37%
Social avoidance in new situations						125	36%
Social avoidance in general						93	27%

From an Islamic perspective, social anxiety is recognized as a challenge many individuals encounter in their social interactions. However, this anxiety can be mitigated through faith and a strong belief in Allah. Surah Al-Hujurat, verse 13, highlights that differences in social status or background hold less significance than piety in the sight of Allah. This understanding can help alleviate social anxiety that stems from the fear of judgment by others. Core Islamic principles such as *tawakal* (trusting Allah after making an effort) and *sabar* (patience) play a vital role in helping students address their social anxiety (Amalia & Saifuddin, 2022). By internalizing these values, students can shift their focus away from societal judgment and towards their personal efforts, ultimately placing their trust in Allah to determine the outcome (Hidayat et al., 2024).

Moreover, strengthening religious identity through community support—particularly the idea of *ukhuwah* (brotherhood)—can provide students coping with social anxiety a sense of security. Schools and families have the opportunity to create a nurturing environment that fosters care and appreciation, free from judgment based on individual achievements or social status. Faith-based mentoring programs or study groups can enhance student connections by offering a safe space for sharing and receiving positive social support (Geertz, 2016).

While social anxiety can be crippling, Zulkarnain and Novliadi (2009) argue that it can also serve as an adaptive response with beneficial effects. Social anxiety may prompt individuals to recognize significant changes they might have previously overlooked. According to Li et al. (2023), anxiety functions as a warning system in the face of danger, motivating individuals to address it by adjusting to their social environments. In this light, anxiety can shield individuals from failure by encouraging the development of social and communication skills (Budyanti et al., 2022). Additionally, social anxiety can inspire individuals to enhance their performance, help them focus on their weaknesses, and ultimately achieve their goals (Putra et al., 2021). However, when social anxiety becomes excessive and irrational, it can negatively affect an individual's social functioning and personal development (Bhamani & Hussain, 2014).

Numerous studies have demonstrated that social anxiety disorder presents a range of challenges for adolescents, including social barriers, declining academic performance, mental health issues, hindered emotional development, and limitations in social skill

acquisition. Kim and Bae (2022) highlighted that social anxiety can lead individuals to avoid or neglect social activities, interpersonal relationships, and responsibilities related to health, work, or school. Additionally, it can significantly affect how individuals perceive themselves and others. Research by Amalia & Saifuddin (2022) indicated that those who exhibit symptoms of social anxiety are more prone to experiencing depression, stress, and sleep disturbances. Consequently, social anxiety is a multifaceted issue that encompasses various behavioral concerns among adolescents and necessitates targeted attention from school counselors.

Considering the expert opinions discussed, it is clear that social anxiety can have both beneficial and adverse effects. When experienced within a healthy range, social anxiety can serve as a protective mechanism against failure, motivate individuals to confront their shortcomings in social settings, and foster a drive for self-improvement. Additionally, it can help individuals focus on addressing their weaknesses. However, when it becomes excessive, social anxiety can lead to harmful consequences that affect various aspects of life.

Counselors providing guidance and support must possess a deep understanding of social anxiety, addressing it through an examination of environmental, social, and individual factors. They should emphasize students' potential and offer positive reinforcement to boost self-esteem. Furthermore, the support of family and peers in everyday interactions is crucial for reducing levels of social anxiety among students. This research highlights the vital role that counselors play in promoting adolescents' development, particularly in nurturing social responsibility, ethics, integrity, and community engagement. Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia emphasizes the significance of high school students recognizing diverse social relationships, valuing harmony, and actively fostering meaningful connections with others (Kemendikbud, 2016). To enhance students' development regarding social responsibility, it is essential to implement foundational and responsive services that address social anxiety.

This study offers valuable insights into social anxiety among high school students in Malang, particularly in the context of Islamic culture and local traditions. By integrating religious and cultural values, we create a crucial framework for understanding how social

norms impact anxiety. These findings can aid school counselors in designing culturally relevant and effective interventions to address social anxiety.

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights but is limited to the city of Malang, which has a unique cultural and religious context. As a result, the findings may not be applicable to other populations. Additionally, the research methodology relies on self-reported data, which may not accurately reflect the actual levels of social anxiety experienced by respondents. Future studies should take into account factors such as gender differences, socioeconomic status, and variations in the school environment to develop a more comprehensive understanding of social anxiety.

The limitations of this study predominantly revolve around its focus on a single location, Malang, which has a specific cultural and religious framework. Therefore, the insights gained may only be relevant to certain populations with different cultural or religious backgrounds. This research employed a survey or questionnaire method, which depends on respondents' self-assessment of their social anxiety levels, potentially leading to inaccuracies. Moreover, the study did not consider other influential factors such as gender differences, socioeconomic status, or variations in the school environment. Additionally, the research period was relatively brief.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that a significant number of high school students in Malang City experience moderate social anxiety. This social anxiety disorder can lead to various issues in adolescents, including difficulties in social interactions, reduced academic performance, mental health challenges, hindered social and emotional development, inappropriate behaviors, and limitations in developing social skills. Understanding social anxiety is valuable for researchers and guidance counselors as they implement preventive measures and address this issue among high school students in Malang City. This study can inform developmental guidance and counseling efforts, emphasizing both prevention and the enhancement of students' social potential. Future research is encouraged to investigate the factors contributing to social anxiety from different perspectives and to expand the geographical scope of the study for a more comprehensive understanding of anxiety.

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