SOCIAL PHOBIA: PERSONALITY TYPE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES

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Abstract: Social phobia is a widespread psychological condition, particularly prevalent in young people, where individuals experience overwhelming anxiety in social situations, leading to avoidance of social interactions and significant emotional distress. This article explores the relationship between social phobia and personality traits, with an emphasis on how specific personality types predispose individuals to develop social phobia and how these traits affect emotional well-being. The research outlines the key causes of social phobia, its emotional and behavioral consequences, and treatment strategies that can help alleviate the condition.

Keywords: social phobia, personality type, emotional disorders, self-confidence, cognitive-behavioral therapy, treatment options

Introduction

In today's dynamic and increasingly interconnected society, social relationships play an essential role in an individual's emotional and psychological well-being. However, for some, these social interactions can evoke intense feelings of fear, anxiety, and inadequacy, leading to a condition known as social phobia (also referred to as social anxiety disorder). Characterized by a persistent fear of being negatively evaluated by others, individuals with social phobia often experience significant distress in public or social settings.

The relationship between social phobia and personality type is a central theme of this study.

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Individuals with particular personality traits may be more susceptible to developing social phobia due to factors such as high neuroticism or low extraversion. The emotional toll of social phobia manifests in a variety of psychological disorders, including depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. This article aims to explore these relationships in depth and examine various therapeutic approaches that can be beneficial for those affected by this condition.

Literature Review

Extensive research has been conducted on social phobia, particularly in understanding its relationship with personality traits. Two major areas of focus in these studies are the big Five personality traits and the emotional impact of social phobia.

Research indicates that individuals with social phobia often score higher on neuroticism and lower on extraversion. High neuroticism is associated with emotional instability, and these individuals are more sensitive to stress and negative emotions (Jabbarov et al, 2023). Conversely, low extraversion means these individuals find social interactions challenging, preferring to avoid them, which exacerbates the isolation caused by social phobia (Beck et al., 2021; Clark & Wells, 1995; Aghajani et al,2014).

Social changes that have occurred in recent decades are characterized by a change in social values and the fact that the speed of these changes is increasing. In these conditions, society places increased demands on social adaptability (Vakil, 2020). Failure to meet these requirements reduces the quality of life, can cause social alienation, social fears and, in some cases, social phobias. Literally translated, the word "social phobia" means "fear of society". As T.E. Daud notes, "in past centuries, anxiety usually arose when perceiving physical danger, today the danger is mainly social and interpersonal in nature" [Daud. 2003]. In its manifestations, social phobia is expressed in an unmotivated fear of performing any social actions or even just communicating with strangers and people of the opposite sex. In general, social phobia is expressed in the fear of being the center of

attention, manifested in painful fears of negative assessment by others and in the avoidance of such situations. Social phobia usually occurs in adolescence and youth, when the skills of independent social interaction are being laid, and its occurrence significantly complicates the formation of these skills [Montgomery, 1983; Jabbarov et.al, 2020]. The problem of social phobia is at the intersection of social psychology, clinical psychology and personality psychology. When considering this problem, attention should be paid to such aspects as the personal and cognitive characteristics of people with sociophobic symptoms, as well as their perception of themselves - identity. The factor that largely determines the interaction of an individual with society is his social identity and personal Self-Concept [Jabbarov; Jabbarov]. One of the traumatic factors that complicate the formation of identity is the systematic violation of boundaries, which creates cumulative trauma. A person's personal identity is determined by the boundaries of "I - Others", when the boundaries are not expressed, the identity is blurred, becomes diffuse [Kernberq, 2000]. By establishing a boundary, the subject creates an opportunity and an instrument for equal interaction. Contact as the most mature form of interaction develops precisely at the border, where separation is preserved, and the resulting unification does not violate the integrity of the personality. Boundaries are formed throughout the child's development: first, these are the boundaries of the physical body, allowing one to separate oneself from the world; psychological boundaries, which allow one to separate one's own mental phenomena; social boundaries, which allow one to determine the balance between the private and the social. In social phobia, one can observe, on the one hand, non-adaptive rigidity of boundaries, and on the other, selective permeability and vulnerability. It should be noted that the formation of physical and psychological boundaries occurs with the active participation of parents, and social boundaries - with the participation of peers with the support of the family. Boundaries determine the attitude to a small and large society - family and friends, social group, ethnicity, humanity. Perception of the environment as friendly, as part of the psychological space allows constructive, life-creating tendencies to manifest themselves, leading to the interpenetration of man and the world [Nartova-Bochaver,2005]. The issues of psychological space in one form or another are touched upon in the works of K. Lewin ("field theory", "life world",

"psychological time and space"), R. Sommer ("transitional object"), F. Perls ("personal space", "contact and boundaries") [Perlz, 2007].

The issues of psychological space in the family and its influence on the development of the child in domestic psychology are most fully reflected in the studies of S.K. Nartova-Bochaver [9]. The problem of psychological boundaries as a phenomenon was not considered by scientists until the beginning of the 20th century. At the same time, in the mainstream of both developmental and social psychology, the framework with which society limited spontaneous human reactions was considered necessary for the assimilation of social norms and rules [Marcinkovskaya,2008]. Of interest is the concept regarding the boundaries between the individual and society of J. Baldwin, who noted that a dialectical approach to the analysis of spiritual development is necessary, that is, the study of what the individual is from a social point of view, and the study of society from the point of view of the individual [Efremenko, 2013]. In the works of J. Baldwin, the question is already raised about the role of psychological boundaries as boundaries not only external, but also internal, which have an ambivalent meaning for the development of intellectual and personal qualities of people. A constructive attempt to integrate the external and internal was made by V.I. Slobodchikov, who compiled a periodization taking into account the "external" and "internal" and identified five stages of human development as a subject of his own behavior and psyche [Slobodchikov,2006]. In the context of social phobia, difficulties in the idleness of the functional boundaries with society. Given that the formation of identity in adolescence occurs mainly in interaction with society [Erikson,2006], this suggests significant distortions and fragmentation of identity in a person with manifestations of social phobia. It should be noted that relationships with parents within the family or persons replacing them are the leading factor in the process of developing physical, psychological and social boundaries that are necessary for the formation of identity and socialization. In the works of E. Erikson, the formation of identity is considered as a continuous process that combines one's own ideas about oneself and the reflection of oneself in other people when interacting with them [Elkind.1969; İvanov, 2003]. Modern studies of identity are carried out at the intersection of several scientific fields: personality psychology,

social psychology, developmental psychology, cognitive psychology []. Identity is a component of individual consciousness and self-awareness that connects a person with social reality and allows one to determine one's place in it [Ramiz and Vakil, 2020].

Methodology

The study utilized both qualitative and quantitative research methods to assess the relationship between social phobia and personality type.

- Big Five Personality Inventory: The Big Five Personality Test was administered to a sample of individuals diagnosed with social phobia to identify key personality traits that correlate with the condition. The traits assessed included extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience.
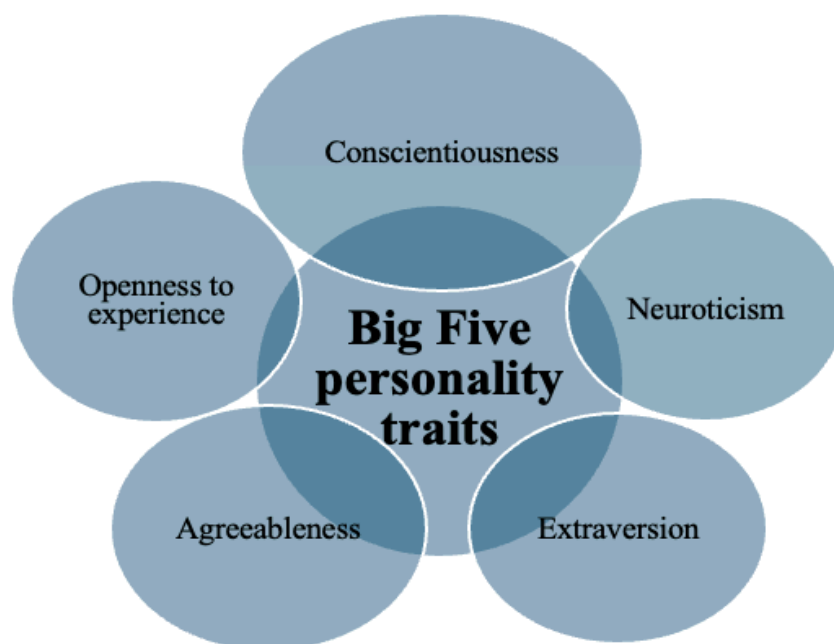
- Social Phobia and Emotional State Assessment: To gauge the emotional state of participants, the Social Phobia and Related Disorders Questionnaire was employed. This survey focuses on identifying specific situations that trigger social anxiety and evaluating the severity of emotional distress caused by these situations.

- Statistical Analysis: Data were analyzed using regression analysis to determine the strength and nature of correlations between personality traits and emotional disorders associated with social phobia.

Results

The study revealed several key findings regarding the personality traits of individuals with social phobia: Neuroticism: The vast majority of participants exhibited high levels of neuroticism, making them emotionally reactive and prone to anxiety. High neuroticism was found to be a significant predictor of social anxiety. Extraversion: Participants with social phobia were found to have low extraversion scores, indicating a preference for solitary activities and avoidance of social interactions.

Emotional Disorders: 65% of the participants reported experiencing emotional disorders linked to social phobia, with depression being the most commonly reported condition. A significant percentage of participants also struggled with low self-esteem and feelings of hopelessness.
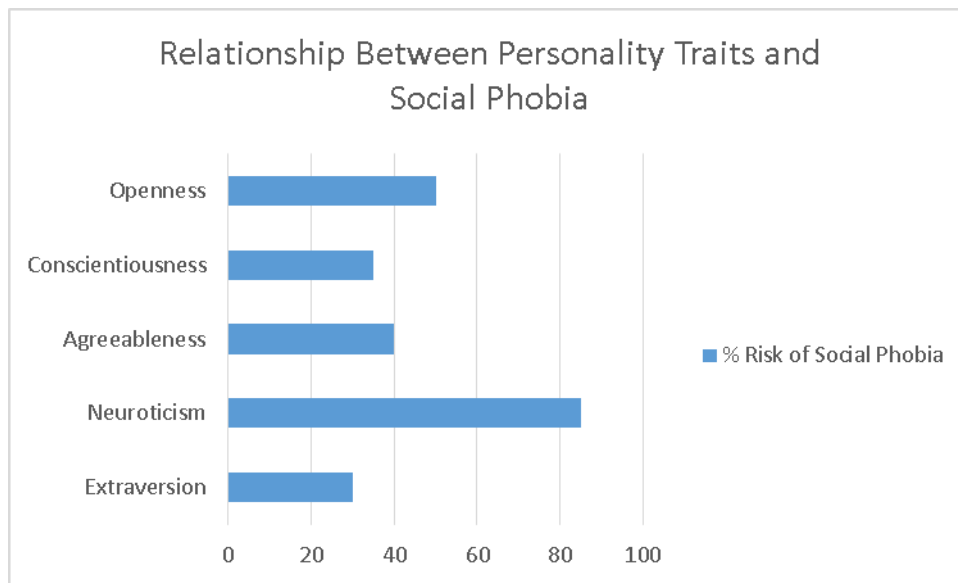
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Figure 1: Personality Traits and Their Correlation with Social Phobia – A diagram illustrating the relationship between the Big Five personality traits (extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness) and the likelihood of developing social phobia.

Emotional and Behavioral Effects:

Emotional disorders, such as depression and feelings of hopelessness, are commonly observed in individuals with social phobia. Due to their excessive concern over social evaluation, individuals may feel trapped in a cycle of negative thinking, leading to chronic stress and emotional exhaustion (Heimberg et al., 2014). In severe cases, social phobia can result in the avoidance of almost all social situations, severely impairing personal and professional growth.
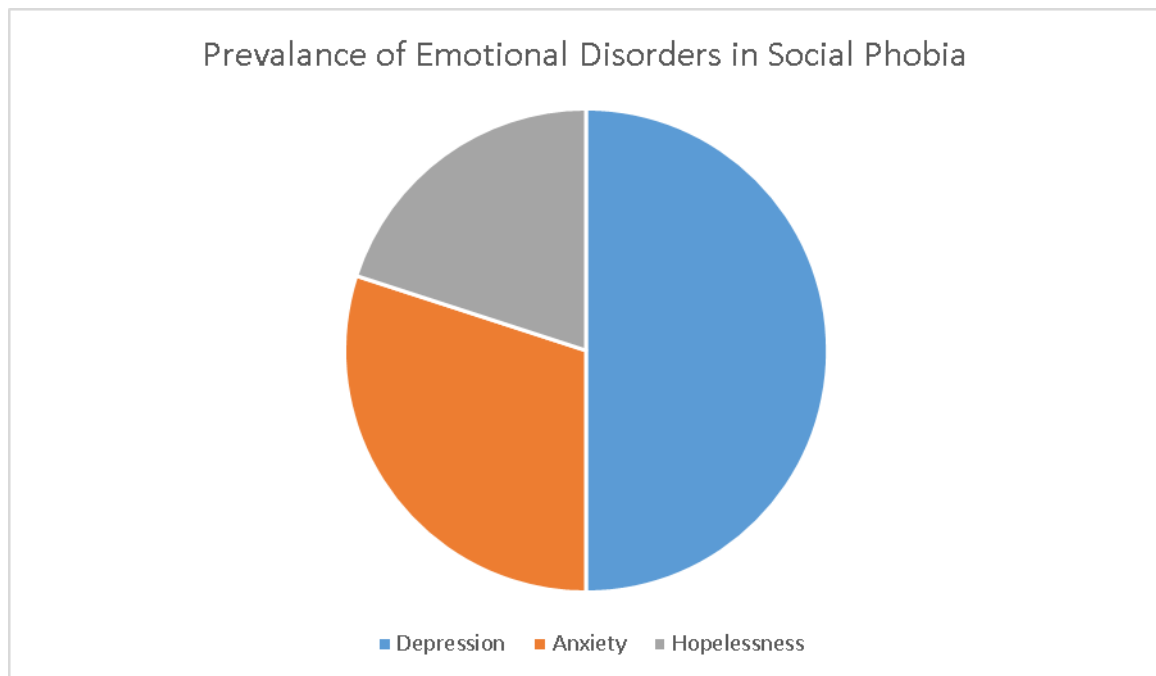
Figure 2: Impact of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy on Self-Confidence – A bar chart showing the improvement in self-confidence among participants before and after undergoing CBT.

Cognitive Behavioral Models of Social Phobia:

Several studies propose that individuals with social phobia tend to have distorted cognitive patterns, such as catastrophizing social situations, believing that they will be negatively judged by others. This often leads to avoidance behaviors, reinforcing the phobia (Clark & Wells, 1995). Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) has proven effective in helping individuals challenge these irrational thoughts and improve their coping mechanisms.

Discussion and Conclusion

his research corroborates earlier studies indicating a strong link between social phobia and certain personality traits, particularly high neuroticism and low extraversion (Beck et al., 2021; Clark & Wells, 1995). The findings suggest that individuals with these traits are more likely to develop social phobia, which in turn exacerbates feelings of isolation and emotional distress.

Effective Treatment Approaches

One of the most widely recognized treatments for social phobia is cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), which helps individuals challenge their irrational beliefs about social interactions. CBT also focuses on building self-confidence and improving coping strategies for anxiety-provoking situations. In addition to individual therapy, support groups provide a valuable opportunity for individuals to connect with others who share similar experiences, fostering a sense of community and emotional support.

The Effect of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy on Confidence
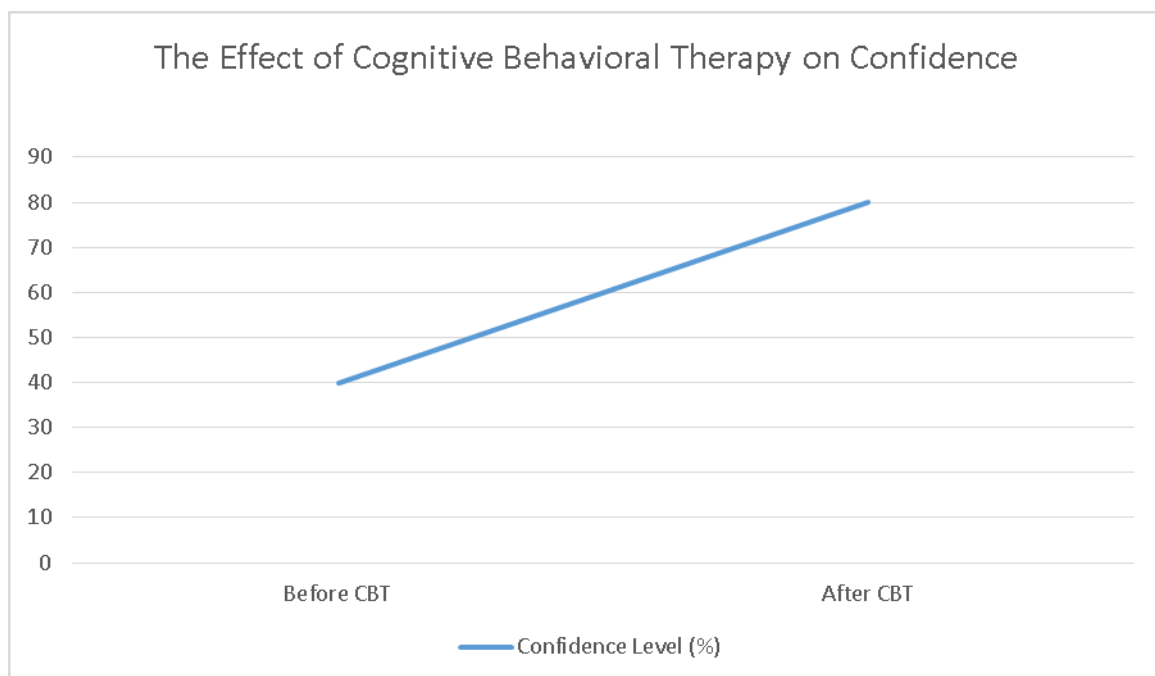
Confidence Level (%)

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Figure 3: Prevalence of Emotional Disorders in Social Phobia – A pie chart depicting the most common emotional disorders (depression, anxiety, hopelessness) experienced by individuals with social phobia.

Biological, Psychological, and Social Factors

Social phobia arises due to the interplay of biological, psychological, and social factors. Research suggests a genetic predisposition for social anxiety, with specific brain regions, such as the amygdala, showing heightened activation in response to social threats. Psychologically, early childhood experiences, negative social interactions, and a lack of self-confidence contribute to the development of social phobia. Social factors, including cultural norms and family dynamics, can also influence the severity and onset of the disorder.

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

CBT is the most recommended approach for treating social phobia. It helps individuals identify and challenge their negative thoughts about social situations and replace them with more realistic, balanced perspectives. Exposure therapy, a component of CBT, involves gradual exposure to feared social situations to reduce anxiety over time.

Pharmacotherapy

In some cases, medications such as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) or beta-blockers may be prescribed to help manage the symptoms of social phobia, especially when the anxiety is severe and debilitating.

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Support Groups

Support groups are instrumental in providing a safe space for individuals to share experiences, learn from others, and develop coping strategies together. These groups also reduce feelings of isolation and help participants build confidence in social settings.

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