

Social Anxiety and Its Effects on New Students

I. Abstract

II. Introduction

- A. Social anxiety is a valid issue as it makes interactions in the workplace or school a daily struggle. This can especially be true in the case of a student starting a school year at a new school; he/she may resort to excuses in order to avoid contact with peers and teachers.
- B. Thesis: When middle and high school students begin a new school year at a new school, the pressure to socialize and connect with people they have yet to meet is generally found to be intimidating. If exclusion or bullying by peers is also experienced during this adjustment period, the risk for mental illness increases dramatically. Feelings of exclusion can lead to more serious mental illnesses such as social anxiety disorder which can lead to low-self esteem, depression, and even suicidal thoughts. When schools strive to make their environment welcoming, incoming students feel less stress when initiating conversation, working in groups, and participating in various school activities/clubs.

III. Factors Affecting Social Anxiety and School.

A. Factors that can cause social anxiety:

1. Genetics.
2. Physical, emotional, or sexual abuse.
3. Divorce or domestic violence (family problems).
4. Maternal stress during pregnancy or infancy.
5. Bullying/teasing by peers

B. New students may feel shy and often will not be the ones to reach out to these groups causing a feeling of exclusion to form. This can also lead to other students taking advantage of those they find alone, perceiving them as “weak”, teasing them, and making the new students feel more apprehensive to attend school.

C. These fears can last well into adulthood and affect career choices and future relationships as well. This can also cause insecurities to rise as people may begin blaming themselves for other people’s opinions, leading to self-exclusion, anxiety disorders, depression, and feelings of unworthiness.

IV. Social Anxiety and Lifestyle

A. For a child, this may mean exhibiting extreme shyness at school, having anxiety to reach out for help from teachers and adults, isolating ones-self from peers, and avoiding various school activities such as dances and volunteering in clubs.

B. For adults, this can include complications in relationships, isolation from friends and activities such as weekend outings, and even declining a job offer that may offer great opportunities.

V. Social Anxiety and the Brain

- A. According to “Bridges to Recovery”, brain scans have shown that people with SAD suffer from complications in two major regions of the brain: the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex.
 - 1. The amygdala, located in the emotional part of the brain, is a set of neurons responsible for making the body able to respond to perceived threats, real or imagined.
 - 2. The prefrontal cortex, located in the cognitive brain, is in charge of calming spurges of anxiety by assessing them rationally and calmly.
- B. People with damage to the prefrontal cortex experience anxiety and, instead of doing its job to calm the amygdala, the prefrontal cortex amplifies the activity of it. This is caused by an intense fear of other peoples’ reactions that the brains of these anxiety sufferers interpret social interactions as legitimate threats, making it very difficult to soothe those fears.

VI. Treatment Through Medication and Therapy

- A. CBT is a psychological treatment known to be effective in improving mental health which focuses on specific problems occurring in the present rather than all of the stressors in one's life.
- B. Most commonly prescribed medications are paroxetine (Paxil) or sertraline (Zoloft), and venlafaxine, all of which are of a specific class known as the selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) medications.

VII. Preventative Mental Health

A. There are various ways to help reduce childhood trauma and other factors that can cause social anxiety and anxiety in general:

1. Improving nutrition is a major way to increase ones quality of life.
2. Housing and one's home lifestyle can have a major effect on one's mental health.
3. Stable and safer households attribute to happier couples and children which ultimately leads to positive mental health.
4. Connecting oneself to the larger community gives a sense of self-belonging, ownership, social responsibility, and purpose.

VIII. Bullying and Islam

- A. Muslims are taught to treat each other with kindness and respect.
- B. Quran Ayahs of Allah supporting the Prophet in times of hardship from disbelievers.
- C. Hadith supporting the resolving of disputes between two people.
- D. Hadith and Qur'anic Ayahs mention the punishment of slandering and backbiting.

IX. Conclusion

- A. Promoting preventive mental health strategies is crucial to solving this situation, increasing awareness, precision in detecting symptoms of social anxiety disorder, reducing stigma, and offering treatment.
- B. Backbone to all these key components lies within the school environment; as that is where the child spends the entirety of their week, it can significantly affect their mood and behavioral patterns.