

**SPECIAL ISSUE: SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER, SOCIAL PHOBIA, and
PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL VARIABLES that affect children, adolescents, and
undergraduate students around the world**

CO-GUEST EDITORS:

Prof. Candido J. Ingles (SPAIN) and Annette M. La Greca (USA)

Introduction
**Current status of research on social anxiety and
relationship with psychoeducational variables: An
international perspective**

Vicente E. Caballo* and Isabel C. Salazar
University of Granada (Spain)

Social anxiety, and its most extreme condition, social anxiety disorder, is a common international problem today. The recent Covid-19 pandemic has brought relief, at least temporarily, to many social anxiety sufferers. The decrease in face-to-face social interactions and the use of face masks have reduced the usually daily discomfort of those interactions. But it has also frozen in time the practice of their social skills and served as a safe refuge from experiencing the daily symptoms of social anxiety so often. We can say, therefore, that the pandemic has served as a reinforcement of social withdrawal behaviors for people with social anxiety, both in children and in adolescents and adults.

One of the studies included in this monograph clearly supports this. In it, adolescent and young adult participants reported avoidance behaviors that were reinforced by the requirements of social distancing and decreased academic engagement during distance learning, with anticipatory anxiety about returning to normal social routines also evident (Coyle et al., 2022, in this monograph). It would be desirable to prepare people with social anxiety, whether they are children, adolescents, or adults, for the new scenario of normality

* Correspondence: Vicente E. Caballo, Faculty of Psychology, University of Granada, Granada (Spain).
E-mail: vcaballo@ugr.es

in interpersonal relationships that, sooner or later, will have to come. But it will have to be done in the right way.

In the United States, legislation guarantees students with social anxiety that schools provide school accommodations for better functioning. Thus, those accommodations might include exemption from classroom participation (e.g., reading aloud, working at the blackboard in front of the class), granting permission to leave the classroom, and the ability to take tests in a separate, quiet environment. But we do not find it surprising that these well-intentioned adaptations may work the other way around, i.e., that by applying negative reinforcement they promote avoidance of interpersonal situations and lead to further deterioration of (social and academic) functioning (Martel et al., 2022, in this monograph). These authors note that schools should carefully consider how accommodations may affect youth with social anxiety and provide interventions that encourage approach rather than avoidance behavior.

In the same direction as above, we could anticipate that school avoidance or school refusal behaviors would be more frequent in students with social anxiety or, in other words, that adolescents with high school refusal would present greater social anxiety than those with low school refusal. This is what the study by Giménez-Miralles et al. (2022, in this monograph) found, suggesting that this rejection is due to feelings of social aversion, negative affectivity, fear of evaluation, or the use of this behavior to pursue the attention of significant others. It is not surprising, therefore, that adolescents with social anxiety disorder experience greater difficulties in school adjustment and show higher dropout rates (Essau et al., 2022, in this monograph), with social anxiety being a significant predictor of behavioral impairment, especially in friendship and classroom learning domains.

But not only do students with social anxiety have a range of problems when they are already in school, but the stressors that often accompany the school transition to high school itself may function as predictors of such social anxiety. This was found by La Greca et al. (2022, in this monograph), who further reported that the tendency to engage in repetitive negative thinking (e.g., worry and rumination), which is very typical of subjects with social anxiety, often serves as a mediating pathway between school transition stressors and social anxiety symptoms.

It seems clear that people with high social anxiety, children, adolescents, or adults, differ in a number of characteristics from those with low social anxiety or without it, as we have seen above. But there are many more, which we will not address in this introduction for lack of space. We will simply highlight briefly one of them, such as self-attributions. Urban et al. (2022, in this monograph) have found that academic self-attributions are different for students with high social anxiety, moderate social anxiety, and students with low social anxiety.

Finally, a word about gender differences in social anxiety. A large-scale study with more than 30,000 participants from 18 countries found small significant but systematic differences between males and females on five dimensions of social anxiety and on global social anxiety (Caballo et al., 2014), with females scoring higher than men in all the cases. For their part, Ranta et al. (2022, in this monograph) also found differences between adolescent boys and girls. Specifically, in one of the dimensions of social anxiety, such as the “public speaking” situation, a higher percentage of girls predicted that they were likely to become anxious in the situation, whereas boys predicted overt negative reactions from peers more frequently than girls.

In summary, this monograph presents a series of international research studies on social anxiety and several psychoeducational variables, and for this reason we congratulate the editors of this monograph and the authors participating in it. Our experience in international research on social anxiety is broad and extensive and we believe that it is necessary to continue working in the field of social anxiety gaining perspectives from different countries and with different topics. Taking into account the manuscripts published in this monograph (and other studies that are available in the literature on social anxiety), now, more than ever, increased research is needed on this construct, especially in the areas of assessment and treatment. Such research will offer increasingly effective interventions, at an international level, for the management of social anxiety (Caballo et al., 2021) and the problems associated with it (Salazar et al., 2022).

REFERENCES

- Caballo, V. E., Salazar, I. C., Irurtia, M. J., Arias, B., Hofmann, S. G. & CISO-A Research Team (2014). Differences in social anxiety between men and women across 18 countries. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 64, 35-40. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2014.02.013>.
- Caballo, V. E., Salazar, I. C., Curtiss, J., Gómez Araujo, R. B., Rossitto, A. M., Coello, M. F., Herrera Puente, J. S., Gamarra, O., Sanguino Andrés, R., Arias, V. B., Hofmann, S. G. & MISA Research Team (2021). International application of the “Multidimensional Intervention for Social Anxiety” (MISA) program: I. Treatment effectiveness in patients with social anxiety. *Behavioral Psychology/Psicología Conductual*, 29(3), 517-547. <https://doi.org/10.51668/bp.8321301n>.
- Salazar, I. C., Caballo, V. E., Arias, V. B., Curtiss, J., Rossitto, A. M., Gómez Araujo, R. B., Herrera Puente, J. S., Coello, M. F., Gamarra, O., Sanguino Andrés, R., Hofmann, S. G. & MISA Research Team (2022). International application of the “Multidimensional Intervention for Social Anxiety” (MISA) program: II. Treatment

effectiveness for social anxiety-related problems. *Behavioral Psychology/Psicología Conductual*, 30(1), 19-49. <https://doi.org/10.51668/bp.8322102n>.

This Introduction is supported by the I+D+i project with reference RTI2018-093916-B-I00, funded by MCIN/ AEI/10.13039/501100011033/ and FEDER “A way of doing Europe”. Support from the Foundation for the Advancement of Clinical Behavioral Psychology (FUNVECA) is also acknowledged.

Recepción: 28 mayo de 2022

Aceptación: 08 julio de 2022