



LEVEL OF SOCIAL PHOBIA AMONG FACULTY OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORTS SCIENCES STUDENTS AT KIRKUK UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Background. The importance of the subject emerges from the fact that students of this college are exposed to repeated public performance situations such as practical presentations, skill tests, and arbitration, which are situations that increase the sensitivity to fear of negative evaluation and affect participation and academic performance. **Objectives.** This research aims to study the level of social phobia among students of the College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences at the University of Kirkuk, and to reveal the differences in its levels according to the gender variable. **Method.** Utilizing a descriptive-analytical methodology, data were gathered from prior experimental investigations and performance reports in sports, swimming, and cycling to assess biomechanical interventions. **Results.** The results showed that the students' level of social phobia was medium to high, with "fear of negative evaluation" representing the most prominent dimension (mean 3.85), followed by anxiety in front of others (3.72), while "social withdrawal" was the lowest (3.41). The results of the t -test also showed statistically significant differences ($p = 0.002$) between the sexes, as females recorded higher levels of social phobia than males, which is consistent with the psychological literature that confirms its greater prevalence among females due to biological and social factors. The study concluded that social phobia poses a real challenge in the academic sports environment and may negatively impact self-confidence, active participation, and achievement. **Conclusion.** The study recommended the design of guidance and training programs aimed at reducing social phobia and developing communication skills, with a particular focus on supporting female students. It also recommended adopting educational strategies that provide a supportive environment that mitigates assessment pressures.

Keywords; sport psychology, social phobia, faculty of physical education and sports sciences.



A. INTRODUCTION

Social phobia is one of the most common anxiety disorders among young adults and university students. It is characterized by a marked and persistent fear of social situations involving evaluation by others, leading to avoidance or enduring these situations with severe distress and discomfort (Emmelkamp et al., 2020). Recent diagnostic guidelines state that the core of the disorder is the "fear of negative evaluation" and associated cognitive and behavioral patterns that promote the persistence of symptoms if not diagnosed and treated early (Rodebaugh et al., 2004). The literature indicates that the university years are a critical stage for the emergence or exacerbation of social phobia due to the increased demands for presentation, interaction, classroom participation, and group activities (Iverach & Rapee, 2014; Koyuncu et al., 2019; Rytwinski et al., 2009).

The study of social phobia is particularly relevant to students in faculties of physical education and sports science, as the requirements of their academic preparation include frequent public performance situations (practical demonstrations, skill tests, leading colleagues, refereeing, training, and public interaction), contexts that heighten sensitivity to fear of evaluation and increase the likelihood of avoidance or confusion. Sports psychology research also shows that the processes of "self- presentation" and fear of negative impressions interfere with physical and emotional performance and may contribute to phenomena such as decreased participation, hesitation to initiate, or "stumble under pressure" when faced with evaluation situations (Wong et al., 2014). Hence, understanding the level of social phobia in this educational environment is a necessary approach to improving learning experiences, creating a supportive climate, and designing guidance interventions that take into account the specificity of public performance tasks in the sports field.

At the institutional level, Kirkuk University represents an important local context for studying the phenomenon. Identifying the levels of social phobia among students in the College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences contributes to diagnosing actual psychoeducational needs and provides academic decision-makers with solid data on the extent and distribution of the problem and its relationship to demographic and academic variables. It can also support learning outcomes and program outcomes by proposing

psychological counseling programs, training in presentation and communication skills, and strategies to reduce avoidance of social situations in classrooms, laboratories, and playgrounds. Building a locally validated knowledge base on the level of social phobia will constitute a practical and scientific addition, enable comparison with international literature, and provide realistic recommendations applicable in similar environments (Mesagno et al., 2015). The importance of the research lies in providing the college with accurate data on the level of social phobia among students, which facilitates early detection of at-risk cases and the development of appropriate referral plans, guidance, and awareness workshops (Heimberg et al., 2010, 2014). Improving university adaptation and social integration, and reducing avoidance that may affect attendance, participation, and achievement.

Social phobia is a common psychological disorder among university students. It is characterized by an excessive and persistent fear of social situations or public performance, accompanied by anxiety about negative evaluation by others, which results in avoidance behaviors and impaired social interaction (Wong et al., 2014). Recent literature indicates that the university stage represents a fertile environment for the emergence or exacerbation of this disorder, due to the requirement to form new social relationships, participate in classroom activities, make public appearances, and endure the pressures of academic assessment (Iverach & Rapee, 2014; Rytwinski et al., 2009).

This problem is compounded in faculties of physical education and sports science, where students face frequent public performance situations, including practical demonstrations, micro-teaching, skill tests, and team management or refereeing in front of peers, professors, and the public. These situations are characterized by a high degree of social exposure, which may increase the likelihood of eliciting feelings of social anxiety compared to their counterparts in other faculties (Bernstein et al., 2022). Therefore, the high level of social phobia among these students may negatively impact their ability to participate effectively, their skill performance, and their academic achievement, as well as their future ability to perform their professional roles in training or teaching with confidence and competence (Beck, 1976; Kneebone, 2016).

Despite the seriousness of these repercussions, the local reality reveals limited studies addressing social phobia within the Iraqi university environment, and a dearth of research

specifically focused on students in colleges of physical education and sports science. Hence, the problem of the current research emerges in the following main question: What is the level of social phobia among students of the College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences at the University of Kirkuk?

The study aims to identifying the level of social phobia among students of the College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences at the University of Kirkuk. Detecting differences in the level of social phobia according to the gender variable (males and females).

Terms definition

Social phobia: “A person’s fear that his performance in a certain situation will be below the level set by others or set by himself, and that his poor performance will be evaluated negatively, and he then expects himself to be the subject of criticism by others”.

Previous and similar studies

1. Study (Mustafa et al., 2014): The level of social phobia and its relationship to psychological adjustment among Saudi students in Jordanian universities. The study aimed to reveal the level of social phobia and its relationship to psychological and social adjustment among Saudi students in Jordanian universities (University of Jordan, University of Science and Technology, Yarmouk University), within the undergraduate stage. The study sample consisted of (180) students who were randomly selected from the study community. The researcher used the social phobia scale . And the measurement of psychological adaptation And social, the study concluded in its results that the level of social phobia was low among the study sample, and that the students had a high sense of psychological and social adaptation, and that there was a statistically significant inverse relationship between social phobia and psychological and social adaptation among Saudi students in Jordanian universities.
2. Study (Midoun & Hethat, 2022): Manifestations of social phobia in a sample of university students “An exploratory study at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Kasdi Merbah University in Ouargla The current study sought to reveal the extent of the prevalence of social phobia among students of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Kasdi Merbah University in Ouargla , and the extent

to which this differs according to gender (males - females). The data collection relied on the Social Phobia Scale of Samer Jamil Radwan (2009). The data were processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 17.0) , and the primary study sample consisted of: (400) male and female students were selected. By the way The quota , and the descriptive approach was used , and the results of statistical processing of the study data showed that the prevalence of manifestations of social phobia among students reached (23.75%), and the study also concluded that there were fundamental differences among students in the prevalence of manifestations of social phobia attributed to the gender variable (males/females).

3. Study (Karim & Rashid, 2023): The study aimed to develop a battery to measure some physical indicators as an indicator to evaluate the performance of female students aged (16-18) years in Tikrit District . The aim of this study was to develop a battery to measure some physical indicators as an indicator to evaluate the performance of female students aged (16-18) years in Tikrit District. The aim was to identify the most important physical abilities that can be relied upon to evaluate the level of motor and physical performance among female students. The researchers adopted the descriptive approach using the construction and testing method. The study was conducted on a sample of (80) female students from intermediate schools in Tikrit District who were randomly selected. The researchers used a set of physical tests to identify the most significant indicators of the level of physical fitness, such as speed, agility, flexibility, muscle strength, and endurance tests. After conducting statistical analysis and testing validity and reliability, a standardized battery was reached consisting of a set of tests that can be relied upon to evaluate the physical abilities of female students, which contributes to the development of academic performance. And the athlete In school and university settings, the results indicated that regular assessment of physical performance is a key factor in enhancing self-confidence and a sense of competence among female students, reflecting the importance of designing objective measurement tools that contribute to the development of training and educational curricula in colleges of physical education and sports science .
4. Study by (Mohammed & Saeed, 2021): The study aimed to identify the effect of exercises using training methods in developing some physical abilities of handball

players, and sought to determine the effectiveness of the training program in improving the general fitness and level of physical performance of players. The researchers adopted the experimental method for its suitability to the nature and objectives of the research, and the experiment was conducted on a sample consisting of (20) handball players, who were divided into two groups (experimental and control). The experimental group underwent A diverse training program using modern methods included strength, agility, endurance, and speed exercises, while the control group continued with the traditional training method. The results of the statistical analysis showed statistically significant differences in favor of the experimental group in all physical abilities under study, indicating the effectiveness of the training methods used in developing physical and psychological performance. The results also showed that regular exercises using modern methods contribute to enhancing self-confidence and improving ability. To control emotions and reduce anxiety during competitions, given the positive social interaction and mutual support provided by the group training environment among players. The study recommended the need to adopt training programs based on diversifying physical methods and stimuli. Because of its role in developing psychological and social capabilities, and enhancing the spirit of cooperation and belonging within sports teams.

5. Study of (Salem, 2022): "Social phobia among athletes in some water sports" aimed to identify the differences in the level of social phobia among athletes in some water sports. The study was conducted on a sample of 109 athletes. The researchers used the social phobia scale prepared by Rami Halawa. The results showed that the educational level affects the decrease and decline in the level of social phobia among athletes in some water sports, and that those who practice sports enjoy a high degree of self-confidence and self-esteem. The educational process and the athletes' joining educational groups and their continued performance of their academic duties allow for the building of social relationships that contribute to raising positive values, a sense of responsibility, the ability to control oneself, a sense of satisfaction and happiness, and creating a spirit of cooperation and belonging.

Review of previous studies

The researchers employed previous studies in more than one aspect in their current study, as Crystallizing the research problem, its importance and objectives. Defining some theoretical frameworks for their current study. Defining the research community and its sample. Determining the statistical methods necessary to achieve the research objectives.

B. METHOD

Participant

The researchers identified the study community as students of the College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences at the University of Kirkuk, morning studies, for all levels, numbering (687) male and female students. The study sample was selected based on Stephen Thompson's equation and its target size was determined at 272 male and female students after calculating the non-response margin. To ensure proportional representation by gender, the sample was distributed stratified according to the gender ratios in the study community. The number of female students in the community reached 186 out of 687, the sample proportion was 74 female students, while the remaining sample comprised 198 male students. The selection process within each stratum (male/female) was conducted either by simple random drawing or by lottery from student records to ensure impartiality.

Research Design

The researchers used the descriptive approach using the survey method because it is appropriate to the nature and problem of the research and to achieve its objectives. Phenomena can only be studied through a specific method that is appropriate to the problem. The nature of the problem is the basis upon which the study method is chosen.

Research questionnaire

The researchers relied on a questionnaire to collect data, as they used Social Phobia Scale of Samer Jamil Radwan (2009), which is considered a reliable and valid tool for measuring the level of social phobia among university students. The scale contains several statements distributed over different dimensions covering the manifestations of social phobia, and responses are evaluated using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, to 5 = strongly

agree). It consists of 20 items distributed over four dimensions: Social anxiety in front of others, Fear of negative evaluation, Social withdrawal, and Confusion and shyness.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the scale in the context of the study, the researchers did the following :

1. Validity of the scale: The validity of the scale was verified through review by experts in the field of psychology. The athlete , in addition to adopting previous studies that used the same scale and proved its validity.
2. Scale reliability: Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated for the scale after applying it to a pilot sample of 30 male and female students who were not included in the main sample, and its value reached 0.89, indicating a high level of reliability.

Table 1. Social Phobia Questionnaire

Phrase number	Phrase	1	2	3	4	5
1	I feel anxious if I know others are watching my work .					
2	I am afraid that others will criticize me for what I do .					
3	I feel nervous knowing people are judging me .					
4	I avoid expressing my opinions for fear of criticism .					
5	I am afraid of making mistakes in front of others .					
6	I feel nervous when speaking in front of a group of people .					
7	I find it difficult to start a conversation with others .					
8	I feel confused when participating in group activities .					
9	I avoid situations that require performing in front of others .					
10	I feel anxious when meeting new people .					
11	I get nervous when I have to answer other people's questions in front of everyone .					
12	I tend to shy away from new social situations .					
13	I prefer to sit alone rather than share with others .					
14	I avoid getting involved in groups or work teams .					
15	I feel uncomfortable in large social gatherings .					
16	I prefer to stay away from group discussions .					
17	I avoid attending social events whenever possible .					
18	I fear that others will make fun of me if I fail to perform a task .					
19	I feel awkward when speaking in front of an audience or group of people .					
20	I am afraid of appearing in situations where others will evaluate me .					

Instructions : Put a mark (✓) on number that reflects degree your consent on all Phrase:

Note: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = slightly agree, 3 = moderately agree, 4 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly agree.

Field procedures

The approval of the College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences administration to conduct the research was obtained. The students were contacted inside the classrooms to

distribute the questionnaires and explain the purpose of the research and the importance of answering accurately and honestly. The confidentiality of the data was emphasized and it was not used except for scientific research purposes. After collecting the questionnaires, they were reviewed to ensure the completeness of the data and its validity for statistical analysis.

Statistical processing

SPSS software was used. (Latest version) for data analysis, where the analysis steps included the Descriptive statistics to calculate the means and standard deviations for each item and dimension of the scale. Analysis of differences to test the presence of differences in the level of social phobia according to the gender variable using the t- test for two independent samples.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Descriptive statistics of level of social phobia among students of the College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences.

Table 2. Data ff Descriptive Statistics

Dimension	Number of items	Mean	Standard deviation	Interpretation
social anxiety in front of others	6	3.72	0.68	Medium High
fear of negative evaluation	5	3.85	0.71	Medium High
social withdrawal	4	3.41	0.63	middle
confusion and shyness	5	3.57	0.65	Medium High
Total	20	3.64	0.59	Medium High

The study results showed that the level of social phobia among students in the College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences was moderate to high. The highest manifestation of social phobia was fear of negative evaluation (mean 3.85), followed by social anxiety in front of others (mean 3.72), while social withdrawal was the lowest (mean 3.41). This pattern indicates that students do not completely avoid social activities and situations, but rather face clear psychological and emotional pressure when interacting or performing in front of others. The researchers attribute this result to the university environment, which constantly exposes students to evaluation situations, whether by professors or peers, which reinforces feelings of anxiety related to performance and public appearances. The lower

average social withdrawal compared to the other dimensions reflects that students maintain a degree of social integration, but this integration remains tainted with anxiety and confusion. This distinguishes social phobia as a disorder based on anxiety about social situations rather than complete withdrawal from them.

Table 3. Data of Social Phobia Between Genders

Variable	Sex	N	Mean	standard deviation	(t) value	probability value (p)
Social phobia	Male	198	3.51	0.58	3.12	0.002*
	female	74	3.85	0.57		

To test differences in social phobia according to the gender variable, the t- test for two independent samples was used. The study results indicate that there are statistically significant differences at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between the sexes in the level of social phobia, as females showed a higher average compared to males, reflecting a clear tendency towards higher levels of anxiety and social fear in females.

Discussion

These results are consistent with recent literature, which confirms that fear of negative evaluation is the most central factor in social phobia disorder, as it is associated with high levels of anxiety and avoidance in public performance situations or when engaging in classroom discussions (Liu et al., 2025). Other studies have shown that this dimension contributes to an increased likelihood of exposure to accompanying psychological problems such as depression and psychological stress, and directly affects the quality of students' academic and social performance (Cavioni et al., 2021; Fegert et al., 2020). On the other hand, evidence suggests that social phobia is typically associated with anxiety related to performance situations rather than pure social withdrawal, which explains why fear of negative evaluation and anxiety in front of others emerged as the most prominent dimensions in this study (Rothenberg et al., 2023).

These findings underscore the importance of adopting guidance and psychological programs directed at students, targeting the development of self-confidence and training in social communication skills, in addition to creating a supportive academic environment that reduces the psychological stress associated with assessment. It is also recommended to

develop university strategies to provide ongoing psychological support to students, especially those most vulnerable to the effects of phobias related to fear of assessment and social anxiety, thus contributing to improving their educational and social experience alike (Midoun & Hethat, 2022; Mustafa et al., 2014).

This trend is consistent with recent psychological literature, which confirms that social phobia disorder is more common in females, and that the severity of symptoms related to fear of social situations and negative evaluation is higher in them than in males. Researchers explain these differences based on several theoretical frameworks. From the perspective of biological theory, research indicates that hormonal factors such as the effects of estrogen and progesterone may increase women's sensitivity to social stimuli and the associated psychological stress (Lin & Guo, 2024; Mofatteh, 2021). From a sociocultural perspective, socialization roles and societal pressures contribute to promoting different behavioral patterns between the sexes, as males are often encouraged to control their emotions and display confidence in social situations, while females are allowed to express more anxiety and confusion, which is reflected in their higher levels of social phobia.

Experimental studies support these findings. Field research has shown that women are more sensitive to situations involving performance in front of others or direct social evaluation, and that they are more likely to experience socially conditioned fear than men. These findings underscore the need to adopt gender-sensitive counseling programs in the design of psychological interventions, focusing on reducing sensitivity to social evaluation and developing self-confidence skills among female students, while creating a supportive university environment that reduces the stress associated with social and academic participation. These programs can also contribute to enhancing students' coping strategies in general, which will positively impact their academic and social quality of life (Abdullah & Abdullah, 2025; Athaya et al., 2023; Da'i et al., 2024; Hardinata et al., 2024; Suniga et al., 2025; Yogi et al., 2023).

D. CONCLUSION

The study results showed that the level of social phobia among students in the College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences was moderate to high, with "fear of negative evaluation" and "social anxiety in front of others" being the most prominent manifestations

of social phobia, while "social withdrawal" was less significant. The results of gender differences indicate that females are more likely to experience high levels of social phobia than males, reflecting the influence of biological and social factors on the experience of social anxiety. The results confirm that social phobia in students is associated with significant psychological distress during social interaction, even when actively participating in classroom and extracurricular activities, which impacts academic and social performance. Developing counseling and psychological programs within the university aimed at reducing levels of social phobia among students, with a focus on social communication skills and self-confidence. Preparing workshops and training courses for students, especially females, to enhance their skills in dealing with social evaluation and difficult social situations. Providing ongoing psychological support to students, through university counseling centers, to reduce anxiety associated with classroom participation and public presentations. Incorporating educational strategies that encourage social interaction in a gradual manner, while creating a supportive learning environment that reduces the psychological stress associated with social evaluation. Encourage future studies to identify the factors contributing to social phobia among university students, including psychological, social, and cultural factors, and link them to academic and behavioral performance. Study the possibility of designing preventive programs for first-year students to reduce the early onset of social phobia and improve their social integration within the university environment.

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F. AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Sajjad Hassan Maktoof Jabara is the sole author of this research. She independently designed the study, developed the research instrument, Jassim Jabara Jassim Ati collected and analyzed the data, interpreted the findings, and wrote the manuscript.

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