



AMERICAN JOURNAL OF HUMAN PSYCHOLOGY (AJHP)

ISSN: 2994-8878 (Online)

VOLUME 2 ISSUE 1 (2024)



PUBLISHED BY
E-PALLI PUBLISHERS, DELAWARE, USA

Revealing the Fear of Negative Evaluation: Exploring Its Impact on Self-Esteem through Emotional Loneliness and Avoidance among Adolescent

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Article Information

Received: December 25, 2023

Accepted: February 01, 2024

Published: February 05, 2024

Keywords

Adolescents, Self-Esteem, Emotional Loneliness, Fear of Negative Evaluation, Social Avoidance

ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a crucial developmental stage characterized by complicated psychological challenges, including the Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE), which can considerably influence Self-Esteem (SE). This research explored FNE's psychological effects on adolescents' SE by utilizing the cross-sectional quantitative approach. It attempted to discover how Emotional Loneliness (EL) and Social Avoidance (SA) mediate FNE and SE relationships. Understanding SE elements is crucial for mental health throughout adolescence. FNE is common in adolescents and associated with psychosocial difficulties. The study showed EL and SA's significant role in mediating the relationship between FNE and SE. The mediation role of the EL and SA are determined through the Sobel test. In both case the value of z-score is greater than its benchmark (1.96) which proves that EL and SA significantly mediate the relationship of FNE, and SE. The research also highlighted some limitations, which include the utilization of cross-sectional methods and the focus on specific cultural settings. The result of this study would help the academics to control the FNE among students and enhance their SE.

INTRODUCTION

A range of psychological and emotional challenges often characterize the phase of adolescence in an individual's life (Zhou *et al.*, 2020). During adolescence, individuals encounter the complexities of developing their identity and integrating into society (Branje *et al.*, 2021). This transitional phase exposes them to a range of stresses that have the potential to have a substantial influence on their SE and emotional welfare (Dewangan *et al.*, 2023). Adolescents are more inclined to see themselves as socially isolated and to experience loneliness due to individualization, identity exploration, and physical and cognitive development (Thomas & Broussard, 2023).

Several research studies have shown a high correlation between fear of negative (FNE) evaluation association with social and emotional loneliness (EL) (Nixon *et al.*, 2023; Sette *et al.*, 2023; Wu *et al.*, 2023). Meter *et al.*, 2023 have cited in their research that 10% of different levels face negative evaluation in their educational sector (Meter *et al.*, 2023). FNE in adolescents and childhood stages disturbs the psychological and mental ability of the students and lowers their SE (Kocatürk & Çiçek, 2023). It can lead to social anxiety and, EL and lower their SE (Gök & Yalçinkaya-Alkar, 2023). According to Ho & Gu, 2023 SE is positive, and the negative attitude of individuals toward themselves (Ho & Gu, 2023). SE is one of the critical elements in the development of human behavior and is associated with emotional and social well-being. Kocatürk & Çiçek (2023) also highlighted that SE is not a stable characteristic of human behavior and usually fluctuate due to change in the psychological characteristics involving social and mental well-being (Kocatürk & Çiçek, 2023).

The present research is significant because it assists

in seeking to build on the empirical and theoretical foundations outlined to assess the level of FNE evaluation among adolescents in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and to investigate its association with EL, social avoidance (SA) and SE. Through the comprehensive examination of the mediating role of EL and SA, this research has helped in determining the impact of the FNE on adolescent SE. Multiple researchers have noted that FNE is the leading cause of social anxiety in adolescents that impacts their SE (Li *et al.*, 2023; Naidu *et al.*, 2023; Niu *et al.*, 2023).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE)

Salem *et al.* (2023) defined FNE as dread about others' evaluation, anxiety regarding the possibility of an opposing decision, prevention of situations involving evaluations, and the expectation of being negatively evaluated (Salem *et al.*, 2023). Previous research has demonstrated that individuals with a high FNE are more stressed than those with a low FNE (Akkuş, 2023). Moreover, according to the current research, individuals exposed to harsh oversight are hesitant to engage in social interactions where they might feel that they are being negatively judged by others, which could worsen their psychological distress and become the reason for their loneliness (Haugen, 2023; Lampraki *et al.*, 2022). Gök & Yalçinkaya-Alkar (2023) found that individuals with a higher dread of negative evaluation are likelier to develop poor SE. Fear about being evaluated typically comes with unpleasant experiences. Therefore, inferiority feelings will likely lead to the FNE (Gök & Yalçinkaya-Alkar, 2023). This research evaluated the association of the FNE with EL, SA and SE. The following hypotheses were designed to examine this variable relationship:

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H₁: Higher FNE is associated with decreased SE in adolescents.

H₀₁: Higher FNE is not associated with decreased SE in adolescents.

H₂: Higher FNE is associated with higher EL.

H₀₂: Higher FNE is not associated with higher EL.

H₃: Higher FNE is associated with higher SA.

H₀₃: Higher FNE is not associated with higher SA.

Emotional Loneliness

Loneliness is a perceived psychological condition that has been linked to disorders of depression, introversion, and lack of social skills, along with objective social isolation. According to Alam *et al.* (2023), loneliness is a condition in which a person feels socially isolated despite being surrounded by others (Alam *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, Perlman and Peplau (1981) describe loneliness as a person who believes they are socially isolated even though as the unfavorable emotion that people feel when they believe their network of social connections is quantitatively or qualitatively inadequate (Huxhold *et al.*, 2022; Purcia *et al.*, 2023). This research considers that loneliness can mediate between the FNE and SE, and it also decreases the SE. When FNE is high, individuals tend to avoid social interactions, resulting in emotional isolation. This EL can contribute to low SE because individuals perceive themselves as socially isolated and less valued by others. Following two hypotheses have been considered for variable SE:

H₄: Higher EL significantly is associated with lower SE

H₀₄: Higher EL is not significantly associated with lower SE

H₅: EL mediates the association between FNE and SE, meaning higher FNE scores will be linked to lower SE.

H₀₅: There is no mediation impact of EL on FNE and SE in teenagers. Thus, EL does not substantially explain FNE and SE.

Social Avoidance

The fundamental fear of social anxiety is the FNE, and individuals with social anxiety exhibit behavioral symptoms such as dread-driven SA (Henricks *et al.*, 2023). Adolescents with high FNE mostly avoid participating in social gatherings and thus have low SE. In this reference, Khoshnam *et al.* (2023) mentioned that FNE adolescents in social gatherings are likelier to cope with social relationships and the search for their identity (Khoshnam *et al.*, 2023). They frequently lack SE and confidence, dread social situations, distrust others, and experience insecurity in familial relationships. They also experience social isolation (Wong *et al.*, 2023). Thus, this variable takes into account the following hypothesis:

H₆: Higher SA significantly is associated with lower SE

H₀₆: Higher SA is not significantly being associated with lower SE

H₇: SA mediates the association between FNE and SE, meaning higher FNE scores will be linked to lower SE.

H₀₇: There is no mediation impact of SA on FNE and

SE in teenagers. Thus, SA does not substantially explain FNE and SE.

Self-Esteem (SE)

SE, defined as how individuals evaluate their importance or as a simple positive or negative attitude toward oneself, is one of the most essential behavioral components of daily functioning. In their research, Aronson *et al.* (2019) highlighted the concept of self-affirmation theory. They noted that individuals have a basic psychological need to maintain a favorable view of themselves and their self-worth. When their SE is at risk, this need compels them to engage in self-affirming activities (Aronson *et al.*, 2019; Obenza *et al.*, 2024). According to Amey *et al.* (2022), Individuals appear to be naturally driven to maintain positive SE, a crucial component of the self-concept, and utilize a variety of mechanisms to boost SE in response to both positive and negative self-relevant feedback. This is accomplished in two primary methods. Adolescents notice and encrypt positive and negative feedback and then deploy negative comments post hoc to maintain high SE. Alternatively, they may encode positive feedback more deeply than negative feedback to positively bias SE (Amey *et al.*, 2022). Mikkelsen *et al.* (2020) mentioned that SE is closely linked to developing psychological and mental issues (Mikkelsen *et al.*, 2020).

Choi *et al.* (2019) highlighted that SE is a socio-meter that provides an individual with acceptance and affection from others (Choi *et al.*, 2019). In this context, Mullan *et al.* (2023) mentioned in their research that an individual who develops appropriately during adolescence is less likely to suffer from low SE and engage in toxic or aberrant behaviors and more likely to become healthy, self-affirming, and self-confident as an adult. In contrast, adolescents who lack SE are more inclined to struggle with social relationships and pursue an essence of identity (Mullan *et al.*, 2023).

This research is performed to resolve the prominent gap in the past literature to determine the pathway to the FNE impacting the adolescent's SE and only limiting the attention toward its influence on causing EL and SA. However, this research bridged the gap by examining these mediating factors. This improved comprehension regarding psychological processes is essential for designing interventions to help adolescents cope with social anxiety and low SE. Consequently, this is crucial for fostering their well-being during this crucial developmental period.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework highlights the critical role of EL and SA in strengthening or lowering the relationship between the FNE and SE. FNE causes EL and SA, thus affecting SE. Adolescents having FNE usually have low SE. By determining the mediating role of EL and SA, the association between the FNE and SE could be evaluated. After the evaluation, strategies can be proposed to minimize SA and EL and strengthen the relationship between the FNE and SE.

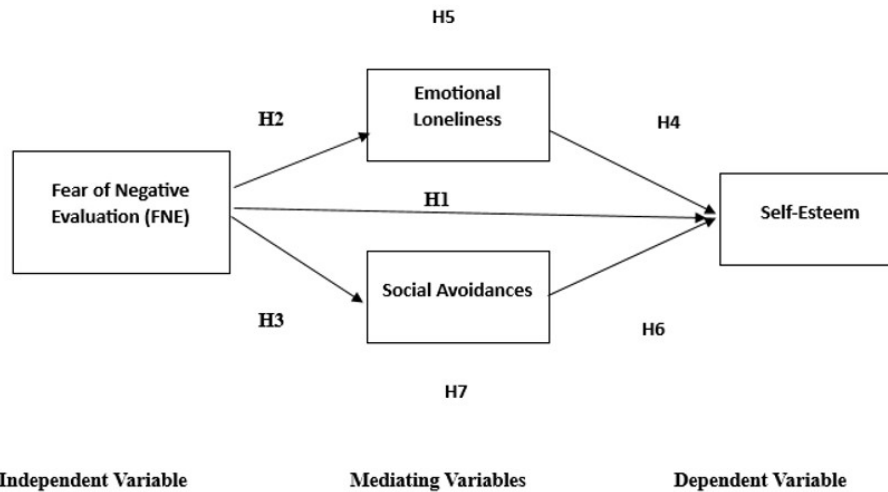


Figure 1: Research Conceptual Framework
Source (author)

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present research utilized the cross-sectional quantitative approach and relied on data collection to quantify the conceptual framework work and to investigate the relationship between the variables (Lin & Fan, 2022). A cross-sectional method was employed, meaning the data was gathered from a single point. The data collection period was from January 2023 to March 2023. Furthermore, the research included no experimental manipulation or environmental control. It examined naturally existing correlations and associations between variables (Lin & Fan, 2022).

Research Participants

Data were collected from the adolescents of Saudi Arabia. Students from ten Saudi Arabian secondary schools made up the research participants in this research. These schools were chosen to offer a broad and representative sample for the research strives in Saudi Arabian secondary schools (Hammad *et al.*, 2023).

Sample Size

A convenience sample size technique was used in this research to find the appropriate sample size. The sample size consisted of the secondary school 10th, 11th, and 12th class, both male and female adolescents. The population

The screenshot shows the RaoSoft interface for sample size identification. It includes input fields for: 'What margin of error can you accept?' (set to 5%), 'What confidence level do you need?' (set to 95%), 'What is the population size?' (set to 2500), and 'What is the response distribution?' (set to 50%). The final output at the bottom states: 'Your recommended sample size is 334'.

Figure 2: RaoSoft for Sample Size Identification;
Source: author

frame included 2,500 Saudi adolescents who fulfilled the inclusion criteria and attended selected secondary schools (Hammad *et al.*, 2023). Rao Software was utilized to determine the minimum sample size. At a 95% confidence interval, the suggested sample size as per the Rao Soft is 334.

As shown in Table No. 1, Out of 334 adolescents, 320 adolescents filled out the questionnaire willingly. Among 320, 187 were male adolescents, while 133 were female adolescents. Table 1 shows the number of adolescents from each school who filled out the questionnaire.

Table 1: Sample Size Table

School Number	RaoSoft Sample Size Distribution	Adolescents	Male	Female
1	34	34	20	14
2	33	32	21	11
3	33	32	16	16
4	34	30	21	09
5	33	32	20	12
6	34	32	17	15
7	33	33	18	15
8	33	32	20	12

9	34	31	16	15
10	33	32	18	14
Total Number	334	320	187	133

Instrumental Scale

A structured questionnaire was utilized for the data collection. Adolescents were approached for the data collection through Google Mail or WhatsApp. After the data collection, the collected data were analyzed through the SPSS. 20 software. The questionnaire involved four sections. The first section was based on the demographics of three main questions: age, gender, and education. Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents-Revised (SAS-A), developed by La Greca & Lopez (1998), was employed to evaluate the two subscales: FNE and SA. Neelmans *et al.* (2019) utilized the same scale in their research that was also adapted for this research (Neelmans *et al.*, 2019). The six-item De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale was used to evaluate EL in large surveys. De Jong Gierveld and van Tilburg (2008) deemed it valid and trustworthy. According to Mund *et al.* (2023), their technique separates social and EL based on factual and theoretical data (Mund *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, for evaluating the SE Rosenberg SE Scale was utilized (Vispoel *et al.*, 2023). The items were scored based on the Likert scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) (South *et al.*, 2022).

Informed Consent

Adolescents were informed that their participation in

the research was totally voluntary, with no consequences if they chose not to complete the survey. Potential participants were under no duress to take part and were offered no monetary compensation. The informed consent of each of them was obtained before they began to fill out the survey, and each returned questionnaire was identified by a code, thus ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of all information obtained from it. No additional risk was anticipated to arise from the involvement of adolescents in the research.

Ethical Consideration

The research was approved by the Humanities and Social Research Ethics Committee at King Saud University under the reference KSU-HE-23-603. The researchers complied with all research ethics principles according to the Declaration of Helsinki.

Pilot Testing

The questionnaire was piloted among 10% of adolescents who met the inclusion criteria to assess its practicality, clarity, and completion time. In the pilot test, 32 adolescents filled out the questionnaires from the targeted ten schools. The number of adolescents for pilot testing who filled out the questionnaire is as follows:

Table 2: Pilot Testing Sample Size

School Number	Adolescents	Male	Female
1	4	2	2
2	3	2	1
3	3	1	2
4	3	1	2
5	3	2	1
6	3	2	1
7	3	1	2
8	4	2	2
9	3	1	2
10	3	2	1
Total Number	32	16	16

Scale

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Table # 2 depicts the 0.913 Cronbach alpha value, which is above the Cronbach alpha benchmark of 0. It means

Table 2: Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.913	12

that the questionnaire is 91.3% consistent or reliable and suitable for further data collection.

RESULTS

Demographic Analysis

Table # 3 depicts the demographics of this research. According to the data, 320 participants have filled out the questionnaires. Among them, 187 were male respondents, while 133 were female respondents. The age of the respondents was segmented into three categories that are 15-16, 17-18, and 19-20. As per the

Table 3: Demographic Analysis

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender	Male	187	58.4	58.4	58.4
	Female	133	41.6	41.6	100.0
	Total	320	100.0	100.0	
Age	15-16	167	52.2	52.2	52.2
	17-18	107	33.4	33.4	85.6
	19-20	46	14.4	14.4	100.0
	Total	320	100.0	100.0	
Class Level	10th Standard	156	48.8	48.8	48.8
	11th Standard	106	33.1	33.1	81.9
	12th Standard	58	18.1	18.1	100.0
	Total	320	100.0	100.0	

data, 167 respondents belonged to the 15 -16 age group, 107 respondents belonged to the 17-18 age group, and 46 respondents belonged to the 19-20 age group. In the class level column, it is shown that 156 respondents were from the 10th standard, 106 respondents were from the 11th standard, and 58 respondents were from the 12th standard.

Reliability Analysis

Table 4 and 5 depicts the reliability analysis of the model based on the overall sample size; out of 334 sample sizes

Table 4: Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.866	12

Table 5: Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	320	100.0
	Excluded	0	.0
	Total	320	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Table 6: Descriptive Analysis

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Fear of Negative Evaluation	320	1.00	3.67	1.9427	.48865
Emotional Loneliness	320	1.00	3.00	1.9229	.48340
Social Avoidances	320	1.00	3.33	2.0066	.45723
Self-Esteem	320	1.00	4.00	2.0292	.51705
Valid N (listwise)	320				

Correlation Analysis

Table 7 depicts the correlation table. The low correlation value is below 0.3; the moderate correlation value lies between 0.3 to 0.5. At the same time, the highest

extracted through the Rao Software, 320 respondents filled out the questionnaire. The reliability statistics have shown the Cronbach alpha value of 0.866, which is above the benchmark value of 0.70. This means that the proposed questionnaire indicated 86.6% reliability.

Descriptive Analysis

Table 6 shows the descriptive chart of the proposed charts. All variable minimum value is 1. SE has the highest maximum value, which is 4, and EL has the lowest maximum value, which is 3. These values indicate the range of responses, with the greatest and lowest scores representing the upper and lower limits of the respective measures for each variable in the 320 sample size. SE has the highest mean value, which is 2.0292, which depicts that, on average, the SE data have shown the highest value. EL has the lowest mean value, which is 1.9229, which depicts that, on average, EL data has shown the lowest value. Furthermore, the maximum standard deviation value for the SE variable is 0.51705, indicating increased dispersion or variability in the data. The data for the SA variable seem to be comparatively less variable, as shown by the lowest standard deviation value of 0.45723.

correlation value is more than 0.5. According to this chart, SA and SE are highly correlated since it has a value of 0.725 (72.5%). FNE and SE are low-moderately correlated to each other, with a value of 0.470 (47%).

Table 7: Correlation Analysis

		FNE	Emotional Loneliness	Social Avoidance	Self Esteem (SE)
Fear of Negative Evaluation	Pearson Correlation	1	.720**	.536**	.470**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	320	320	320	320
Emotional Loneliness	Pearson Correlation	.720**	1	.493**	.537**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	320	320	320	320
Social Avoidance	Pearson Correlation	.536**	.493**	1	.725**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	320	320	320	320
Self Esteem	Pearson Correlation	.470**	.537**	.725**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	320	320	320	320

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Regression Analysis Direct Effect of Independent Variable on Dependent Variable (Self-Esteem)

As per the model summary, Anova, and coefficient table depicted in Tables 8, 9 and 10, respectively, there is a moderate relationship between the FNE and SE. The “R” value that is 0.470 depicts that FNE and SE are 47% correlated with each other Whereas, the value of R square,

which is 0.218, shows that there is a 21.8% variance in SE due to the FNE. The F value in the Anova chart depicts that this model is 90.081% valid. Similarly, the value of significance (0.00) in the coefficient chart supports that high FNE is associated with lower SE. Hence, it supports the following hypothesis:

H₁: Higher FNE is associated with lower SE.

Table 8: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.470 ^a	.221	.218	.45715

a. Predictors: (Constant), FNE

Table 9: Anova

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	18.826	1	18.826	90.081	.000 ^b
	Residual	66.458	318	.209		
	Total	85.283	319			

a. Dependent Variable: SE

b. Predictors: (Constant), FNE

Table 10: Coefficient

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.063	.105		10.135	.000
	Fear of Negative Evaluation	.497	.052	.470	9.491	.000

a. Dependent Variable: SE

Direct Effect of Independent Variable on Mediating Variable (Emotional Loneliness)

As per the model summary, Anova, and coefficient table depicted in Tables 11, 12 and 13, respectively, there is a strong relationship between the FNE and EL. The “R” value that is 0.720 depicts that FNE and EL are 72% correlated with each other Whereas, the value of R square, which is 0.517, shows that there is a 51.7%

variance in EL due to the FNE. Similarly, the regression model explains considerable variation in the dependent variable, as shown by the very significant F-value of 342.280. Furthermore, the coefficient chart depicts a 0.000 sig value that is less than 0.05, suggesting a strong association between variables. Hence, it supports the following hypothesis.

H₂: Higher FNE is associated with higher EL.

Table 11: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.720 ^a	.518	.517	.33600

a. Predictors: (Constant), FNE

Table 12: Anova

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	38.642	1	38.642	342.280	.000 ^b
	Residual	35.901	318	.113		
	Total	74.543	319			

a. Dependent Variable: EL

b. Predictors: (Constant), FNE

Table 13: Coefficient

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.539	.077		6.993	.000
	Fear of Negative Evaluation	.712	.038	.720	18.501	.000

a. Dependent Variable: EL

Direct Effect of Independent Variable on Mediating Variable (Social Avoidance)

As per the model summary, Anova, and coefficient table depicted in Tables 14, 15 and 16, respectively, there is a moderate relationship between the FNE and social avoidance (SA). The “R” value that is 0.536 depicts that FNE and SA are 53.6% correlated with each other Whereas, the value of R square, which is 0.287, shows that

there is a 28.7% variance in SA due to the FNE. Similarly, the regression model explains considerable variation in the dependent variable, as shown by the very significant F-value of 128.118. Furthermore, the coefficient chart depicts a 0.000 sig value that is less than 0.05, suggesting a strong association between FNE and SA. Hence, it supports the following hypothesis.

H₃: Higher FNE is associated with higher SA

Table 14: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.536 ^a	.287	.285	.38664

a. Predictors: (Constant), FNE

Table 15: Anova

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	19.152	1	19.152	128.118	.000 ^b
	Residual	47.538	318	.149		
	Total	66.690	319			

a. Dependent Variable: SA

b. Predictors: (Constant), FNE

Table 16: Coefficient

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.032	.089		11.635	.000
	Fear of Negative Evaluation	.501	.044	.536	11.319	.000

a. Dependent Variable: SA

Direct Effect of Mediating Variables on Dependent Variable

The above model summary table #17 depicts the 0.754 R-value, which means that the mediating variables are

75.4% correlated with each other. The R-value that is 0.565 means that there is a 56.5% variation in SE due to EL and SA. Similarly, the regression model in Table # 18 explains considerable variation in the SE, as shown by

the very significant F-value of 208.210. Furthermore, the significance value for both EL and SA variables is “0.000,” indicating strong statistical significance. This implies that higher EL and SA significantly affect SE in the regression model. Whereas the constant’s “Sig.” is 0.088, which

is not significant but worth considering in the model. According to these result, it can be hypnotized that:

H₄: Higher EL significantly is associated with lower SE

H₆: Higher SA significantly is associated with lower SE

Table 17: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.754 ^a	.568	.565	.34100

a. Predictors: (Constant), SA, EL

Table 18: Anova

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	48.422	2	24.211	208.210	.000 ^b
	Residual	36.861	317	.116		
	Total	85.283	319			

a. Dependent Variable: SE

b. Predictors: (Constant), SA, EL

Table 19: Coefficient

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.162	.095		1.710	.088
	Emotional Loneliness	.254	.045	.238	5.603	.000
	Social Avoidance	.687	.048	.607	14.310	.000

a. Dependent Variable: SE

Mediation Analysis

To determine the mediation role of EL and SA Sobel test has been performed. The Sobel test is a way to use statistics to figure out how important it is that an independent variable has a secondary effect on a dependent variable through a mediator. It checks the standard error of the indirect effect in a mediation model to see if the mediation effect is statistically different from zero. The calculation of a z-value within the framework of mediation analysis is denoted by a formula as given below, in which a and b denote coefficients, and “sa” and “sb” represent their corresponding standard errors. By calculating the z-value, which is utilized to assess the significance of the indirect effect, the formula offers valuable information regarding the statistical significance of the mediation effect.

$$z\text{-value} = a*b / \sqrt{(b^2*sa^2 + a^2*sb^2)}$$

a= Unstandardized coefficient of Independent variable

Sa= Standard Error Independent Variable

b= Unstandardized Coefficient of Mediating Variable

Sb= Standard Error of Mediation Variable

EL as Mediation Variable

To determine the “a” and “sa” values, find out the regression analysis by considering FNE as an independent variable and EL as a dependent variable. Similarly, to find out the “b” and “sb”, consider EL and FNE as independent variables and SE as dependent variables. After running a linear regression test, the following values have been achieved:

a = 0.712

Sa= 0.038

b= 0.442

Sb= 0.072

$$z\text{-value} = 0.712 * 0.442 / \sqrt{(0.442^2 * 0.038^2 + 0.712^2 * 0.072^2)}$$

$$z\text{-value} = 5.8337$$

This z-score value is more than the z-score benchmark value, which is 1.96. It means that EL is significantly mediating the relationship between FNE and SE. Hence it is proved that:

H₅: EL mediates the association between FNE and SE, meaning FNE increases EL that is linked to lower SE.

SA as Mediation Variable

To determine the “a” and “sa” values, find out the regression analysis by considering FNE as an independent variable and SA as a dependent variable. Similarly, to find out the “b” and “sb”, consider SA and FNE as independent variables and SE as dependent variables. After running a linear regression test, the following values have been achieved:

a = 0.501

Sa= 0.044

b= 0.750

Sb= 0.051

$$z\text{-value} = 0.501 * 0.750 / \sqrt{(0.750^2 * 0.044^2 + 0.501^2 * 0.051^2)}$$

$$z\text{-value} = 9.0031$$

This z-score value is more than the z-score benchmark value, which is 1.96. It means that SA is significantly

mediating the relationship between FNE and SE. Hence it is proved that:

H₇: Social Avoidance mediates the association between FNE and SE, meaning higher FNE scores will be linked to lower SE.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study have shown that lower SA and EL have decreased FNE and increased adolescent self-esteem. Both EL and SA serve as mediators of the relationship between FNE and self-esteem, shedding light on the psychological processes underlying adolescents' SE. These findings have implications for comprehending and addressing social anxiety and SE issues among adolescents. Liao *et al.* (2023) research has demonstrated that individuals with a high dread of negative evaluation tend to have reduced SE. Several studies examining social anxiety, self-perception, and self-worth have demonstrated this relationship (Liao *et al.*, 2023).

Lampraki *et al.* (2022) mentioned in their research that those with a high FNE are more inclined to experience emotional isolation. FNE can contribute to EL by causing social withdrawal, avoidance of social situations, and difficulty forming meaningful social connections (Lampraki *et al.*, 2022). The robust positive association found between FNE and EL in this study is consistent with these findings. Tomska *et al.* (2022) indicated the direct association of FNE with SA and distress—general, hours of sleep and internet use indicate that adolescents who scored more highly on SA and distress were more likely to fear being judged, evaluated, or rejected and suggests that they may respond to such anxieties by sleeping longer or using the internet for prolonged periods, which in turn may worsen their condition (Tomska *et al.*, 2022). This research also correlates with our finding, as we also highlighted that FNE has contributed significantly to adolescents' SE. The research overall supports the following hypothesis:

H1	Higher FNE is associated with lower SE.
H2	Higher FNE is associated with higher EL.
H3	Higher FNE is associated with higher SA
H4	Higher EL is significantly associated with lower SE
H5	EL mediates the association between FNE and SE, meaning FNE increases EL that is linked to lower SE.
H6	Higher SA is significantly associated with lower SE
H7	SA mediates the association between FNE and SE, meaning FNE increases SA that is linked to lower SE.

There is limited research available on determining the association between the FNE and SE through the SA and EL. The current study offers scientific evidence for the mediating effects of EL and SA on the FNE-SE relationship, expanding our understanding of how the dread of negative evaluation influences SE via these

mediators. Even though not all studies have investigated these specific mediators, this study contributes to the developing corpus of evidence in this field.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the complex relationship between FNE, EL, SA, and SE among Saudi Arabian adolescents. The study found strong support for the hypothesis that higher FNE is associated with reduced SE, increased EL, and increased SA. EL and SA have been identified as significant mediators of the relationship between FNE and SE. These findings emphasized the importance of addressing FNE and its psychological effects in adolescence to promote emotional well-being and SE. Future support and intervention mechanisms should focus on reducing FNE and mitigating its harmful effects on the mental health of adolescents.

Limitations and Future Implications

The cross-sectional design of this study is a limitation, as it limits the capacity to determine causal relationships between variables. In addition, the research was conducted within Saudi Arabia, particularly, so the applicability of the results to other cultural contexts may be limited. Another potential limitation is the use of self-report measures, which are susceptible to response bias. Future researchers could consider the longitudinal study and utilize the qualitative analysis or mixed method. Furthermore, they can also target other audiences like adults or women or places other than Saudi Arabia.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following are the recommendations to control the EL and SA in adolescents to strengthen the relationship between FNE and SE:

- Create and perform adolescent FNE intervention programs in different schools in Saudi Arabia. These programs should assist teenagers with social anxiety by increasing interpersonal abilities, SE, and EL (Al Awaji *et al.*, 2022).
- Include mental health education and awareness in the curriculum to assist kids in understanding FNE, EL, and SA. School counselors and educators can help identify and assist students early (Bi *et al.*, 2023).
- Develop longitudinal investigations of FNE, EL, SA, and SE in teenagers. This would clarify dynamics (Foseid, 2023).

Create online resources for adolescents to obtain FNE and mental health information, support, and coping methods. Virtual help is more accessible (Remskar *et al.*, 2022).

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