
UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER IN INDIA

Dr. Swarupananda Sarkar*¹ and Dr. Deepak Tak²

¹Professor, Department of Psychiatry, Swasthya Kalyan Homoeopathic Medical College and Research Centre, Jaipur Rajasthan, India.

²PG Scholar, Department of Psychiatry, Swasthya Kalyan Homoeopathic Medical College and Research Centre, Jaipur Rajasthan, India.

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***Corresponding Author: Dr. Deepak Tak**

PG Scholar, Department of Psychiatry, Swasthya Kalyan Homoeopathic Medical College and Research Centre, Jaipur Rajasthan, India.

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ABSTRACT

Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD) in India is under-recognized due to cultural beliefs, lack of awareness, and stigma. This article discusses the symptoms, causes, and impact of SAD, emphasizing the cultural and social context in India. Despite challenges, treatment options like Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), medication, and homeopathic remedies offer effective management. Increased awareness, support from family and peers, and improved access to mental health services are essential for addressing SAD. Homeopathy's holistic approach also presents promising solutions for alleviating symptoms and improving quality of life for individuals with SAD in India.

INTRODUCTION

Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD), also known as social phobia, is a mental health condition characterized by an intense fear of social situations where one might be scrutinized or judged by others. It can lead to significant distress and impairment in daily functioning, affecting personal, academic, and professional life. In the context of India, where mental health awareness is still growing, SAD remains under-recognized and often misunderstood. According to the National Mental Health Survey of India 2015-16, the lifetime prevalence of anxiety disorders, including SAD, is around 3.6% in the Indian population.^[1]

Understanding Social Anxiety Disorder

Symptoms and Diagnosis

Individuals with SAD experience extreme fear and anxiety in social situations, leading to avoidance behaviors. Common symptoms include:

- Fear of being judged or embarrassed
- Avoidance of social interactions
- Physical symptoms like sweating, trembling, and palpitations
- Difficulty in making eye contact and speaking in public

Diagnosis of SAD is based on standardized criteria such as those outlined in the DSM-5, which requires that the fear and avoidance of social situations persist for at least six months and cause significant impairment in functioning.^[2]

Causes and Risk Factors

The causes of SAD are multifactorial, involving a combination of genetic, environmental, and psychological factors. Some potential risk factors include:

- **Genetic Predisposition:** Family history of anxiety disorders can increase the risk of developing SAD.
- **Environmental Influences:** Traumatic social experiences or bullying during childhood can contribute to the development of SAD.
- **Psychological Factors:** Low self-esteem, perfectionism, and high sensitivity to criticism are common traits in individuals with SAD.

Impact on Daily Life

SAD can significantly impact an individual's quality of life, leading to:

- **Academic Challenges:** Fear of participating in class and speaking in public can hinder academic performance.
- **Professional Impairment:** Difficulty in networking, public speaking, and job interviews can limit career opportunities.
- **Social Isolation:** Avoidance of social interactions can lead to loneliness and depression.

Social and Cultural Context in India

Stigma and Awareness

In India, the stigma surrounding mental health issues poses a major barrier to seeking help. Only a small percentage of those suffering from anxiety disorders seek professional help due

to fear of being labeled as "mentally ill" or "weak." This stigma is rooted in cultural norms that prioritize social conformity and discourage open discussions about mental health. [3]

Cultural Factors

Indian society places a high value on social interactions and community participation. This cultural expectation can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and fear of judgment in individuals with SAD. The emphasis on academic and professional success can also increase pressure and anxiety in social situations.

Treatment and Support

Support Systems

Support from family, friends, and peers plays a crucial role in managing SAD. Encouraging open communication and understanding can help reduce the stigma and provide a supportive environment for individuals with SAD.

Access to Mental Health Services

Despite the increasing awareness of mental health issues, access to mental health services in India remains limited, especially in rural areas. According to the World Health Organization, India has less than one mental health professional per 100,000 people, highlighting the need for better mental health infrastructure. [4]

Psychotherapy

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT): CBT is considered the gold standard for treating SAD. It helps individuals identify and challenge negative thought patterns and gradually face feared social situations. [5]

Homeopathic Medicines for Social Anxiety Disorder

Homeopathy offers several remedies for managing symptoms associated with SAD. Here are some commonly used medicines:

1. Argentum Nitricum [6]

Disposition: Apprehensive, impulsive, hurried.

Trait: Fear of heights, narrow spaces, and anticipatory anxiety.

Causative Factor: Anxiety before public speaking or performing.

2. Gelsemium^[7]

Disposition: Weak, trembling, drowsy.

Trait: Anticipation anxiety, aversion to crowds.

Causative Factor: Fear of embarrassment or failure.

3. Lycopodium^[8]

Disposition: Lack of self-confidence, irritable.

Trait: Fear of responsibility, avoids confrontation.

Causative Factor: Anxiety worsens from anticipation.

4. Pulsatilla^[9]

Disposition: Weepy, needy for consolation.

Trait: Fear of abandonment, easily influenced.

Causative Factor: Anxiety in unfamiliar surroundings.

5. Silicea^[10]

Disposition: Anxious, lacking in self-confidence.

Trait: Fear of confrontation, sensitive to criticism.

Causative Factor: Anxiety due to fear of failure.

CONCLUSION

Social Anxiety Disorder is a prevalent and debilitating condition that affects many individuals in India. Despite the challenges posed by societal stigma and limited access to mental health services, increased awareness and supportive interventions can significantly improve the lives of those with SAD. It is essential for individuals, families, and communities to recognize the importance of mental health and work together to create a more inclusive and supportive environment.

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