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Research on Social Exclusion Among Adolescents based on Social Anxiety

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Abstract: Social exclusion has become a common issue among adolescents nowadays. As the root of diverse issues among adolescents, it creates significant obstacles for them in all parts of life. However, there is no clear analysis to show how social exclusion directly brings up psychological disorders in adolescents. With some research made by psychologists, it has come into view that social exclusion, an action to repel individuals from entering a group, negatively impacts adolescents' cognition of themselves or society. Under severe circumstances, such problems could even cause psychological disorders, such as a social phobia or avoidance personality disorder. To give a deeper exploration of the topic, this article mainly discusses how adolescents are troubled by the issue of social exclusion and how their cognitive thinking should be improved to avoid social anxiety. As a result, increasing adolescents will be solving the dilemma of social anxiety and focus more on their studies and life.

Keywords: Adolescents; Social Exclusion; Social Anxiety; Improve Cognition.

1. Introduction

Social exclusion in adolescents is a scenario that exists with the relevance of poorness, deprivation, or plight, which also is determined by multidimensional elements, such as economics, politics or culture.

Adolescents exclude others or be excluded based on several reasons:

(1) Lack of ability

(2) Behavioral overly unusual in a group (either good or bad)

(3) Without good family conditions

(4) Having non-ideal appearances or personalities

For the first type, people usually burden the whole group or worsen its performance whenever these individuals appear. Therefore, adolescents exclude them for gaining better accomplishments on themselves instead of countering those individuals. The second type is similar to the first group, since people dislike individuals with adverse influences on their group. In addition, individuals acting extremely well may lead to jealousy from the rest and, thus, being supplanters. Next, without similar family economic levels, it becomes a paradox for those members to stay together due to the diverse consumption concept. Lastly, lacking an appealing appearance and characters cause a group to reject individuals since they are less attractive.

By exploring the basic factors, it can easily lead to a conclusion that relationships in-group is determined by multi-aspects. Thus, it causes adolescences' eagerness for positive relationships in society to build up self-assurance; otherwise, the exclusion will bring up members' strong psychological reaction.

In further studies, foreign psychologists have shown that social exclusion has a significant impact on the cognition, emotion, behavior, interpersonal relationship and self-esteem of the excluded ones, which has destructive consequences on the physical and mental health of the individuals. Social phobia and avoidant personality disorder are two specific psychological disorders that lead to the avoidance of society, which are direct consequences of social exclusion. Clear explanation of those will help to provide precise therapy for corresponding symptoms.

After searching for a great many documents and literature, this article provides plenty of ways to analyze adolescents' cognitive, emotional, behavioral and interpersonal change due to social exclusion and how social anxiety could be treated with psychological therapies; wishing to help more adolescents to walk out of social issues.

2. The Cognitive, Emotional and Behavioral Effects of Social Exclusion in Adolescents

2.1. The Impact of Social Exclusion on Cognition

Studies have shown that social exclusion impairs individual cognitive processes. Psychologists found in their study that social exclusion affected cognitive processes related to individual surrender and examined the impact of social exclusion on specific cognitive processes [1].

First, Twenge and his coworkers proposed that social exclusion leads to a disorganized state of cognition, characterized by a distorted perception of time, excessive attention to the present and neglect of the past and future, unresponsiveness, and avoidance of self-awareness of one's own shortcomings. Twenge asked subjects to estimate different time intervals and found that rejected subjects all overestimated the time interval compared with accepted subjects. At the same time, the results show that the excluded people are more inclined to consider the situation in the present and are challenged to pay attention to the future.

Twenge and his coworkers measured the subjects' reaction time using a game that required rapid reaction time. The results showed that the response of the rejected subjects was significantly lower than that of other subjects. One of the main features of cognitive disintegration caused by social exclusion is avoidance of self-awareness, in which the excluded individual is unwilling to focus on their own troubling and painful shortcomings and inadequacies. Twenge had participants enter a room with two chairs, one facing a mirror and the other facing a wall. The choice of facing the wall indicates the subjects' avoidance of self-

awareness. The results showed that the rejected subjects overwhelmingly chose the chair facing away from the mirror. These results support the idea that social exclusion leads to cognitive disintegration.

Therefore, these research results show that social exclusion affects the excluded people's cognitive evaluation of themselves and others, mainly manifested in significantly lower self-esteem and more negative evaluation of those who reject them. The research results also show that social exclusion leads to cognitive changes, in which the excluded individual evaluates the person who rejects him more negatively while behaving with less self-assurance, leading to social avoidance [2].

With the torturing experience of social exclusion and cognitive change, adolescents create doubt in themselves and try to make self-reflection. Afraid of being excluded again, they will have a negative tendency toward establishing relationships or socializing with peers, thus, feeling lonely, jealous, depressive and anxious. According to many investigations, social exclusion leads adolescents to anger, depression, perplexity and apathy, respectively. Such emotion will finally cause adolescents' indifferent toward socializing with friends or feel a sense of tension whenever they wish to make contact with peers [3]. This is caused by their uncertainty of results and anxiety about falling into the same dilemma as their previous experiences of social exclusion.

2.2. The Impact of Social Exclusion on Physical and Mental Health

Social exclusion can have a particular impact on the physical and mental health of the excluded. Numerous studies have shown that health, happiness, and happiness are related to whether individuals are accepted in a group. Those deprived of close social ties lead to more negative physical and psychological outcomes, and people who live alone have higher rates of physical and mental illness compared to people with more robust social networks.

Lastly, psychologists have also conducted research on excluded individuals' self-regulation abilities. Compared to the control groups, those who are usually excluded express more extreme reactions toward all the tests. For instance, they may lose control of eating; they may easily give up persevering in challenging themselves; they may even refuse or feel anxious in answering questions from the researchers. Those behaviors all reflect the isolation from socializing among excluded adolescents and how they want to avoid social contact in life due to unconfidence.

3. The Specific Social Anxiety Disorders and Ways to Deal With

Since all the impacts of social exclusion —— cognitive, emotional and behavioral changes —— have pointed to the socially isolated feeling by the excluded individuals, we could now infer how social and mental disorders will suffer adolescents. Therefore, the following paragraphs describe the two main psychological problems that lead to social exclusion, namely, avoidance personality and social phobia, and the complex challenges faced by adolescents with social anxiety disorders and how they should use psychological methods to deal with these problems [4]. From Figure 1 below, it can be seen that social anxiety symptoms occur in a very large proportion in the adolescent age group

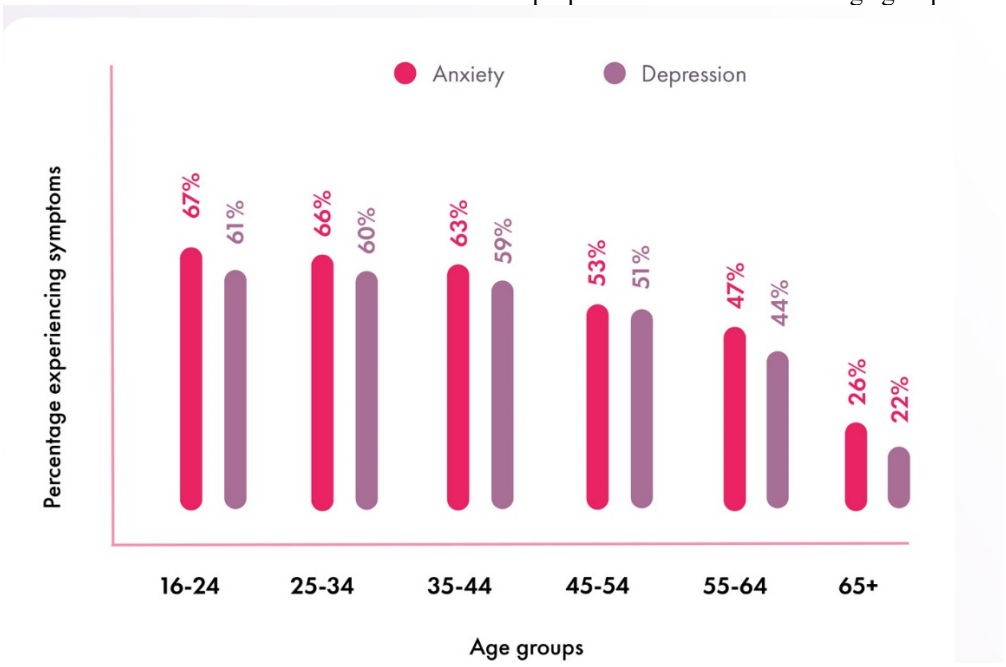


Figure 1. Symptoms of social anxiety across age groups

First, an avoidant personality disorder is a type of personality disorder, which is usually a persistent pattern of behavior that does not conform to cultural norms and causes emotional distress to the individual or those around them. Usually grouped with other personality disorders, an avoidance personality disorder is characterized by nervousness and fear. People with avoidant personality disorder have a chronic sense of self-inadequacy and are sensitive to negative comments from others. Clients tend to avoid social interaction due to the intense fear of rejection, though they would like to interact with others. It is estimated that about 2.4% of the U.S. population has avoidant personality disorder from adolescence. Environmental factors, particularly in adolescents, play an essential role in explaining [5]. Those with the disorder often report past experiences of peer rejection, which can impact a person's self-esteem and sense of worth or be vacillant in socializing.

In order to make a precise diagnosis for the clients, the

healthcare provider will begin the evaluation by performing a complete inquiry about medical history and physical examination if some symptoms, such as poor self-image or nervousness and fear in social settings and relationships, are present. Although no laboratory tests to specifically diagnose a personality disorder, a provider might use various diagnostic tests to rule out potential physical illness as the cause of the symptoms.

In the absence of physical symptoms, a psychiatrist or psychologist, a healthcare professional specially trained to diagnose and treat mental illness, uses specially designed interview and assessment tools to assess a person's disorder, such as avoidant personality disorder.

Although personality disorder is challenging to be treated because these disorders have deep-rooted patterns of thinking and behavior, which have existed in the long-term, adolescents with avoidant personality disorder are usually good candidates for treatment since most of them desire to be cured of the great depression. Such motivation factor makes the combination of "medication" and "psychotherapy" approaches ideal for treating patients. Psychotherapy is used for counseling clients and changing one's thinking and behavior, also called cognitive behavioral therapy. This therapy will likely focus on overcoming fears, changing thought processes and behaviors, and helping adolescents cope better with social situations. Medication — such as an antidepressant or anti-anxiety drug — might help manage the anxiety of people with an avoidance personality disorder. In addition, it will be the most effective treatment for adolescents when family members are all involved and supportive. (Cleveland Clinic)

Another similar mental disorder, social phobia, categorized as anxiety disorder, is also an impact caused by social exclusion. Also known as social anxiety disorder, this mental illness is affected by the experience of fear and anxiety in specific or social situations, such as social exclusion, due to a fear of being judged or humiliated. (DSM-5).

Unlike social anxiety disorder, symptoms of social phobia are more relevant with the feeling of tension and anxiousness, such as faster heartbeat, sweating, nausea or fatigue, which are physical signs, and emotional and mental symptoms: irritability, restlessness, jumpy or even dread.

According to some research and estimates, social phobia has affected up to 5% adolescents in the United States, mainly caused by genetic issues in brain or environmental factors including maltreatment by peers or families like social exclusion. Furthermore, people with social phobia are also an increased risk for other mental illnesses, such as depression and substance use disorders, which often begins early in life, average in teenage ages, and also lasts a long time [6].

Other than CBT (cognitive-behavioral treatment), adolescents who suffer from social anxiety disorder caused by social exclusion are encouraged to utilize the support of groups, with peers suffering under the same circumstances, to learn from each other's advantages, the definition of CBT is shown in Fig 2. Although this is not an official form of psychotherapy, which could not replace the standard treatment of therapy or medications, group therapy is still considered as a good supplement.

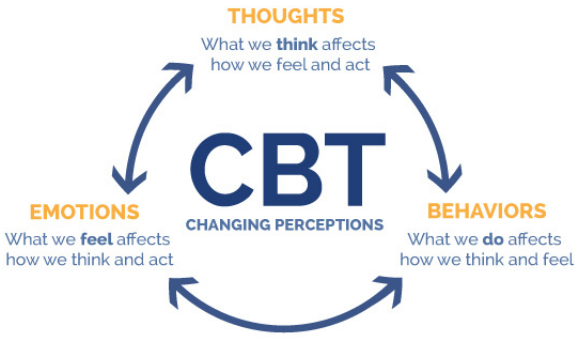


Figure 2. The definition of CBT

On top of that, medication provides non-negligible importance on treating patients. The most commonly used medications for social phobia that are considered first-line treatment are selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs). These medications are categorized as an antidepressant, but are used under many other conditions, including social phobia. Selective serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitor (SNRI) venlafaxine (Effexor) has also been shown to help in social phobia. (Alison Yarp, MD, MPH)

4. Conclusion

Social exclusion has become an unavoidable issue in adolescents' daily life, which doubtlessly leads to serious issues. Due to the generalization of social exclusion and its great impact on people's social life and psychological behavior, this field deserves the continuous attention and in-depth study of researchers. In terms of the topic-- the negative psychological consequence that social exclusion brings to adolescents, this article has made the following discussions.

First, social exclusion and its correlation with the personality of the excluded members should be made with clearer research. It is observed that social exclusion is related to low self-esteem; in this way, people who are usually refused by groups are usually unreliable, selfish, lack of sincerity, disobey rules or laws or easy aggression. Hence, people should effectively improve their behaviors in order to obey decrees of the whole society, being more acceptable to integrate into the society.

Secondly, people should increase the research range of the social exclusion psychology, which could help to categorize each type into different sections, such as social relationships, politics, cultures, economics and so. The recent view of this region is still limited in single social exclusion. Therefore, how to expand the scope of psychological research on social exclusion and further improve the ecological validity of relevant research is also a very worthy question.

Lastly, people should also do more research on the direct cause and effect experiments between social exclusion and social anxiety disorders. As a result, more valid therapies could be invented with precise data to support the results, which can help to cure more adolescents from social exclusion and social anxiety disorder.

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