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Nature of social phobia among sportsman and athletes

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Abstract

This modern age is the age of competition where only the fast paced individuals with mental as well as physical stability win the race. Sportsman and Athletes face number of problems in their lives such as stress, strain, frustration, and anxiety due to social phobia. This will affect the performance of sportsman and athletes when they are involved in the games and sports. The dimensions of social phobia are inferiority complex, social withdrawal, shyness, stress and fear. Thus, the present article focuses on the nature of phobia among sportsman and athletes. Further, the causes of social phobia, such as temperament, family history, and learned behavior/environment are discussed in detail. The physical symptoms that can be particularly distressing for sportsman and athletes with social phobia includes excessive perspiration, trembling, blushing or stammering when trying to speak, nausea or diarrhea. However, the treatment to eradicate social phobia involves providing proper education and training; establish helping partnerships; maintain a physical and emotional supportive environment. The article hopes that the outcome of article will be of some help to teachers, administrators, mental health professionals and parents to identify the causes and design appropriate remedial programs.

Keywords: Social phobia, nature, symptoms, treatment, sportsman, athletes

Introduction

Each age group in the society has its own role. Sportsman and athletes of age group between 18 to 30 years form a major sector of sports field. They are considered to represent the future as they bring new skills and energy to add to the pool of success. They bring enthusiasm and vitality which can lead to new discoveries and developments that can benefit sports field or even the world at large. They are considered as the divers of social change. Country's major economic developments rely on them. Sportsman and athletes are innovative and creative to bring about changes and developments to place their country on par with global nations.

Today in the present scenario, India is a vast country with an enormous population that is increasing quite rapidly. This modern age is the age of competition where only the fast paced individuals with mental as well as physical stability win the race. Sports field existing today is very complex in nature. Therefore Sportsman and Athletes face number of problems in their lives such as stress, strain, frustration, and anxiety. Sportsman and Athletes today possess very high potential, education and knowledge and will to excel, but are deprived of showcasing their potential in a social setting because of fear and anxiety they have. It is felt that there is a need to identify the causes of social phobia and suggest suitable measure to cover this annually among our sportsman and athletes. Hence, the present article express the nature of phobia among sportsman and athletes.

Social phobia is one of the most common disorder in sportsman and athletes. This disorder impacts on interpersonal functioning. Not only are the educational and carrier aspirations of many people with social phobia severely affected by the distress that they experience in routine. Social interaction, individuals with social phobia are also more likely to have low levels of social support, which has adverse implications for mental and physical health. Hence, it has a high prevalence and marked impact in life. It is a great hindrance for the young adults in achieving great heights. This lowers their self-esteem to a great extent. This prevents them from being self-actualized. Self-actualizing people are self-aware focus on personal growth and not very concerned with the opinion of others and desire to achieve their potential. Therefore it is evident that social phobia has a negative impact on self-actualization among sports and athletes.

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Hence the prevalence of the present article that is nature of social phobia among sportsman and athletes is found to have significance in the present day situation.

Concept of Social Phobia

An excessive, strong fear of performing any act in front of public, or in any social occasion experienced by an individual is termed as Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD). It is also known as Social Phobia. Such persons have a fear of getting embarrassed in social situations. They have a strong belief that they would be branded as foolish, weak, or as a person with a lot of inadequacies. Panic attacks are the symptoms frequently expected by those affected by this disorder.

As a consequence they tend to avoid social situations or they tend to tolerate such phobic situations with great stress. A few of the indications of show that that a person is suffering from SAD includes Blushing, Trembling, or Difficulty in Performing. Very often children display the symptoms such as crying, throwing temper tantrums, experiencing a freeze, clinging to caregivers, a failure to perform in social situations or shrinking away from social interactions. Sportsman and athletes may display such symptoms in peer group situations or during interactions with others. The fearful or anxious response must persistently occur in reaction to, or anticipation of, most social situations.

Social Phobia typically includes fear of:

- Public performance or other observation by others,
- Social interactions

Public performance anxiety occurs in the context of public performance. Some examples are a teacher calling upon a student in class, or an employee making a sales presentation at work. People with public performance anxiety are typically worried that others will notice their shaking hands and trembling voice. They fear they will be dreadfully embarrassed and negatively judged by others. Children and adults with this disorder may also be afraid to eat or drink in front of others because they fear people will notice their shaking hands, or that they will do something embarrassing (such as spill their drink).

Dimensions of Social Phobia

Based on the characteristics and causes of Social Anxiety Disorder, the following dimensions are coined.

Inferiority complex

An inferiority complex is often unconscious, and a behavior that has low self-esteem. One with inferiority complex would feel somewhat inferior to others who may be strangers, friends or near and dear ones. One with inferiority complex would always degrade themselves while comparing them to others and feel as if they are lower than others. It is mainly a condition that is caused by their early childhood experiences that impacts their adulthood psychologically. Such an occurrence is possible if it is not recognized in early stage. Those with inferiority complex often belittle themselves and are usually very sensitive and touchy.

Symptoms of Inferiority Complex

Those with inferiority complex will usually feel like they do not live to the expectations and standards of those around him or her and thus end up isolating themselves from society. Alienating themselves from others is a symptom with those diagnosed with the inferiority complex. They may consider

themselves as not significant as others and they will tend to withdraw themselves from society.

Demeaning Others: Constantly having the urge to prove that they are better than others in order to boost their self-esteem – those with inferiority complex will constantly demean others to make themselves feel better. When they fail, they would criticize others so that they could feel better because of their low self-esteem.

Blaming the Universe: Every time the person fails, he would immediately blame external factors, like bad luck, bad company, or the environment as a whole. Those diagnosed with the inferiority complex are unable to accept that their failure are caused by themselves and blame it on the world so that they could feel better.

Sour Grapes: Whenever someone around them did something successfully, that person would immediately attribute their success to external factors such as plain luck. Opposite to their own failures, a colleague's success will never be cause by personal capabilities.

Lack of Sportsmanship: These people would refuse to participate in any competitions, where their abilities would be constantly tested and compared to others.

Extreme Sensitivity: People diagnosed with the inferiority complex will be extremely sensitive when it comes to criticism and compliments. Whenever they feel like someone is about to compliment or criticize them, they will be on defense immediately. They also take comments very seriously and personally and might react on a bigger scale.

Seeking Attention: These people desperately yearns of compliments but at the same time, do not always believes in them.

Fear of Making Mistakes: They are afraid to encounter something new because they are afraid to making mistakes and getting in trouble for them.

To those diagnosed with the inferiority complex, they must change the way they view the world. It is also difficult for them to accept that they have such a disorder.

Social Withdrawal

People who have anxiety problems tend to display characteristics of social withdrawal. Such an occurrence of social withdrawal varies from person to person, and may have multiple causes: however, for any given cause there are also multiple solutions. Social withdrawal can be a symptom, cause, and a particular type of anxiety. Some people develop social withdrawal because of their anxiety symptoms whereas some others develop anxiety symptoms because they've withdrawn from social situations. Anxious people have a desire to retreat from society, isolating themselves from others. It may appear to others that such people are pessimistic, angry at the world. But it is not so. This happens because they feel uncomfortable in social situations. This may be due to physiological causes in which chemical reactions occur in their brains due to anxiety. In some cases, withdrawal itself may be a symptom of anxiety. Many people who are bogged down with stress may feel an overwhelming desire to be alone. But they fail to understand that being alone actually makes the situation even worse. When a person is alone his

thoughts will overwhelm him with negativity whereas when one is in the company of others, it becomes harder to be stuck in your own mind.

Negative Thoughts: Social withdrawal can often be triggered by negative thoughts. That's because self-esteem plays a tremendous role in the development of anxiety. If you have too many negative thoughts, you increase the likelihood of feeling more anxious. If you experience negative thoughts and find yourself making any of the excuses below, it may be time to re-evaluate your choices to avoid a complete mental and physical collapse. Here are some of the reasons people find to avoid changing their lives to minimize their anxiety.

Low Self-esteem: Some people feel good about feeling bad on some level because they are trying to atone for perceived wrongs they have committed in the past, or have low enough self-esteem that they decide they should be miserable. These people will realize they are suffering from anxiety, but not feel motivated to do anything about it (and are also probably suffering from some level of depression).

Low Effort: Though it can seem crazy, some people can rationalize it to the point that it is perfectly reasonable in their minds. They figure that if they are suffering, it is because they have not worked hard enough to make life easy for themselves. While this mindset can be productive, it can also result in running yourself into the ground if you are in a bad state to begin with.

Interiority Complex: While it's perfectly valid to value, for example, the well-being of your loved one or of a blood relation such as a child as much as or perhaps more than your own, some people give so much of themselves to others they begin to feel guilty if they spend any effort making their own lives better. Because being selfless is a good thing, it is hard for these people to see beyond the selfishness they believe to be behind talking care of themselves to the necessity it really is.

Social Withdrawal: When a person assumes that he has no power over his life when it becomes difficult to handle, he actually becomes more powerless, not to mention more vulnerable to collapse. Admitting you have a problem is the first step. Once you recognize this you need to find out what you can do about it.

Shyness

Shyness is the tendency to feel awkward, worried or tense during social encounters, especially with unfamiliar people. Severely shy people may have physical symptoms like blushing, sweating, a pounding heart or upset stomach; negative feelings about themselves; worries about how others view them; and a tendency to withdraw from social interactions. Most people feel shy at least occasionally. Some people's shyness is so intense, however, that it can keep them from interacting with others even when they want or need to leading to problems in relationships and at work.

Shyness is a feeling of fear or discomfort caused by others people, especially in new situations or among strangers. Shyness is an unpleasant feeling of self-consciousness – a fear of what other people are thinking. This fear can inhibit a person's ability to do or say what he wants. It can also prevent the formation of healthy relationships. Shyness is often linked to low self-esteem. In its extreme form, it is considered social anxiety.

Causes of Shyness

About 15 per cent of infants are born with a tendency toward shyness (Rubin *et al.*, 2010) ^[10]. Research has shown biological differences in the brains of shy people. But a propensity for shyness also is influenced by social experiences. It is believed that most shy children develop shyness because of interactions with parents (Rubin, *et al.*, 2010) ^[10]. Parents who are authoritarian or overprotective can cause their children to be shy. Children who are not allowed to experience things may have trouble developing social skills. A warm, caring approach to rearing children usually results in them being more comfortable around others. Institutions, neighborhoods, communities, and culture all shape a child. Connections a child makes within these networks contribute to his or her development. Children with shy parents may emulate that behavior. In adults, highly critical work environments and public humiliation can lead to shyness.

Symptoms of Shyness

Not all children who play alone happily are shy. Fear and anxiety are elements of shyness. One of the first signs that a child's shyness might be a cause for concern is the child does never want to leave a parent's side. Children who do poorly in their studies or who have a difficult time making friends should be evaluated for shyness. Children who have been victimized by bullying are at risk for developing shyness. Rejected children who are constantly ridiculed may exhibit aggressive behavior, as overcompensation for shyness. Neglected children who are unable to care for themselves are at risk as well.

Preventing Shyness

Parents and guardians can prevent children from becoming shy by helping them develop these skills:

- coping with change
- managing anger
- using humor
- showing compassion
- being assertive
- being kind
- helping others
- keeping secrets

All of these abilities can help children to be at ease among their peers.

Stress

A state of imbalance in the psychological and physiological realm of an individual caused by wide variations in the demands of situations or environment and the individual's capacity to cope with such demands as well as the level of motivation required to face those demands results in Stress.

Stress can be either positive or negative. Stress is considered to be positive when an individual feels that the situation offers an opportunity to gain something stress is considered as negative when a person perceives social, physical, organizational and emotional problems. This reduces his level of motivation and prevents him in utilizing his opportunities fruitfully.

Causes of Stress

Stressful situations are encountered by everyone during one's lifetime; such situations may vary from minor negligible incidents to alarming traumatic incidents which very rarely

occur in one's life. Such situations cause stress in varying degrees and impact the day to day functioning of the individual. Some forms of stress, may have a positive effect on our performance, while there are other forms of stress cause an individual negative distress causing pain and agony. Of late there is an increasing tendency among psychologists in investigating into the causes and the physical and emotional responses to stress. We can categorize stress into the following groups:

- a. **Acute Stress:** These are minor stresses negligible incidents which have a short term impact which will disappear in a very short time. There are also stresses caused by traumatic incidents which lasts longer and have a very strong impact on one's life.
- b. **Episodic Stress:** These are the stresses caused by recurring situations which are also short lived but they are repetitive. For example the stress of a housewife every morning to get her husband and children ready for their office and schools. When she finishes her stress is relieved. This is repeated almost every day.
- c. **Chronic Stress:** Such stresses are caused by long lasting situations like prolonged illness of a family member or never ending debt trap. Such stresses are ongoing and continue to bother the person for a long time.

Fear

Fear is a primitive and powerful emotion expressed by animals as well as human beings. It alerts a person about a perceived danger and enables the individual to take adequate precautions to secure the safety of self from the presumed danger. It is known that animals and humans display other responses to a threat.

A person or animal might play dead or just 'freeze' in response to a threatening situation. This may also result in yelling or screaming which is a fighting response. As a result, some researchers suggest an expanded version of the fight-or-flight response, namely, "freeze, flight, fight, or fright" Bracha, Ralston, Matsunaga, Williams, and Bracha, 2004). There are also other fear responses such as seeking others for help or social support, in order to make a situation less tense, less dangerous, or less uncomfortable in some way or also other fear responses. (Taylor, Klein, Lewis, Gruenewald, Gurung, and Updegraff, 2000). The emotions of fear and anxiety are triggered in response to a perceived threat. Fear and anxiety may determine whether avoidance behavior are present or not (Sylvers, *et al.*, 2011 Lang, *et al.*, 2000). Hence, avoidance behaviors may indicate the emotion of fear, whereas in the case anxiety a person may be on the alert but does not avoid the situation.

Fear can have to dimensions namely biochemical and emotional dimensions.

Biochemical Reaction: Responses such as sweating, increased heart rate and high adrenaline levels are the physical responses which are also termed as the 'fight or flight' response. In such a response the body prepares itself to either fight or escape.

Emotional Response: The emotional response to fear varies from individual to individual. Some people like to experience the thrill associated with extreme sports and others fear – inducing thrill situations whereas there are some others who experience a negative reaction to the feeling of fear. They try to avoid fear-inducing situations at all costs. Fear may be experienced as either positive or negative although the physical reaction is the same.

Acclimatization

If a person is exposed repeatedly to a particular fear inducing situation, it leads him familiar with the situation. This results in reduction of the fear response and may result in elation. As a result such individuals will to seek out to even new and bigger thrills. It also forms the basis of some psychotherapeutic treatments, which depends on gradually minimizing the fear response by repeatedly exposing the individual to such fear inducing situations.

Role of Fear in Decision Making

The emotion of fear protected animals as well as humans from predators and other threats to the survival of the species. Hence certain perceived dangers evoke the emotion of fear, as fear helps protect and enables one to be adaptive, functional. Fear plays a role in decision-making. That is, when an emotion is triggered it impacts ones judgment and analysis of pros and cons of an action and choices to be made in uncertain situations (Lerner and Keltner, 2001). In a risk taking, participants who were fearful consistently made judgments and choices that were pessimistic and focused on their perception of risk in any given situation. On the contrary, happy or angry participants were found to disregard risk and make optimistic judgments and choices (Lerner and Keltner, 2001). In the same way, individuals who have fear as a dominant emotion are found to avoid taking risks. Whereas other persons who have lesser lever of emotion of fear were found to take optimistic decisions disregarding the risk perception (Sylvers, *et al.*, 2011). Thus, awareness of one's emotions and considering how they might influence ones decision-making in a given situation is important in the approach to life, or work, and goals.

Signs and Symptoms of Social Phobia

Common symptoms of social anxiety include physical symptoms and psychological symptoms. The physical symptoms that can be particularly distressing sportsman and athletes with social phobia include:

- Excessive perspiration
- Trembling
- Blushing or stammering when trying to speak
- Nausea or diarrhea

These physical symptoms often cause further anxiety as the person fears others will notice even though signs are usually barely noticeable to those around them. People with social phobia also worry excessively that they will do or say the wrong thing and that something terrible will happens as a result.

People with social phobia try to avoid situations where they fear acting in a way that's humiliating or embarrassing. If avoidance isn't possible, they endure the situation but can become extremely anxious and distressed and may try to leave the situation as soon as they can. This can have a serious negative effect on their personal relationships, professional lives and ability to go about their daily routine.

A diagnosis of social phobia is based on having the typical symptoms, which cause significant distress or impairment of day-to-day functioning, and symptoms are persistent for example at least for six months.

Causes of Social Phobia

There are number of causes of social phobia, including:

- Temperament – sportsman and athletes who are shy or socially inhibited are particularly at risk. Clingy behavior,

shyness, crying, easily and excessive timidity may indicate temperaments that could possibly put them at risk of developing social phobia.

- Family History – social phobia can run in the family, in part because of a possible genetic predisposition.
- Learned Behaviour / Environment – some sportsman and athletes with social phobia attribute the development of the condition to being poorly treated, publicly embarrassed or humiliated (e.g., being bullied at sports meet).

Treatment to Social Phobia

This scientific literature supports the use of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) for treating social anxiety disorder. CBT uses practical and logical strategies directed at changing the factors that maintain anxiety such as negative thoughts or expectations, physical symptoms, avoidance, and the reactions and responses of sportsman and athletes to an anxious situation. Sportsman and athletes learn to think more realistically about fears and to confront the feared social situation. Training in social skills such as initiating conversations, inviting others to get together, and being assertive are also incorporated into treatment.

Institutions could assist socially anxious teenagers as follows:

- a. Provide Education and Training – for institution personnel that would increase awareness of anxiety disorders, identify specific criteria to determine need for intervention, recognize anxiety as an institution and educate parents of sportsman and athletes with anxiety about the problem
- b. Establish Helping Partnerships – between parents and institution personnel. It is critical that both be involved so that progress made in one place is not undone in the other. Institution counsellor can organize all involved individuals.
- c. Maintain a Physical and Emotional Supportive Environment – for anxious teenagers at institution by :
 - Being inclusive in physical activities and ensuring opportunities for shy sportsman and athletes
 - Using structured institution activities and assisting the initiation of social interactions.
 - Assigning an institution buddy who provides support and assistance.
 - Providing structured social activities and assisting the initiation.

In order to overcome the inferiority complex, athletes and sportsman must be able to regain themselves and begin a process by positive thinking, differentiating the good from the bad, acceptance, and avoidance.

With regard to Shyness, overcoming extreme shyness is essential for the development of healthy-self-esteem. Shyness can result in difficulties at school and difficulties forming relationships. Most shy children outgrow shyness, but one in three becomes more troubled (Jaret, P. 2005) ^[5]. *Psychotherapy* can help children cope with shyness. They can be taught social skills, how to be aware of their shyness, and ways to understand when their shyness is the result of irrational thinking. *Relaxation Techniques*, such as, deep breathing can help children and adults cope with shyness. *Group Therapy*, can be helpful in children and adults suffering from shyness. If an adult's shyness becomes so severe he avoids tending to his responsibilities, he should seek help (American Psychological Association, 2013) ^[1]. *Medication*, in rare instances, medication can provide

temporary relief for shyness.

Suggested measures may help a person to relieve stress: regular meditation; physical exercise; balance diet; focused thinking; control of anger; managing depression; maintaining calmness in stressful situations; developing a positive attitude in life; maintaining harmony in situations and environments, within self and with others.

Conclusion

Social phobia could disrupt performance of sportsman and athletes and subsequently effect on achievement. Since its impact on life on individual as observed from findings, efforts need to be taken to treat social phobia in an educational setting to promote to attainment of goals. This could be done through counselling sections both for the teacher and the taught. Scientific literature supports the use of Cognitive Behaviour Theory (CBT) for treating social phobia. This enables individuals to think more realistically and confront social situations.

Schools and Colleges could assist individuals through education and training of personnel's to be aware of the disorders among individuals and the need for intervention –

- Partnership between parents and colleges personals could be established.
- Physically and emotionally supporting environment could be maintained through inclusive activities to ensure opportunities for shy children, by rewarding efforts to initiate social interaction and involving all individuals to participate.
- Parents could also be helped to manage social phobia in their children.
- Through rewards, praise and attention.
- Through encouragement of ward to handle social tasks on his own
- reframing from taking extra care
- By helping to brain storm and handle things independently and by limiting reassurance.

Self-actualization in an individual occurs when he realizes his inherent potentials and put them to action in order to achieve his aims or goals. But there are several inhibitions that prevent a person from realizing his hidden potentials. One of the several factors is social phobia or social anxiety disorder that becomes a hurdle in realizing his potentials. Early adulthood is a stage of growth and development in a person's life. At this stage he is expected to outgrow the turbulent psychological mindset which he underwent as an adolescent. He is supposed to develop clarity in his thoughts, ideas, action as well as interpersonal social relationships. Social phobia is a barrier that hinders his future development. At this stage it is necessary to research the shortcomings and provide an appropriate environment so that they sustain a stable mind and focus on his potentials to lead him to self-actualization. Hence, in this article an attempt is made to identify the existing problem among the young sportsman and athletes and to examine and suggest appropriate remedial measures – both preventive as well as curative so as to enable the young adults to have a fruitful and bright future life as well as achievement of career goals. The article hopes that the outcome of article will be of some help to teachers, administrators, mental health professionals and parents to identify the causes and design appropriate remedial programs.

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