

Exploring the Relationship between Fear of Public Speaking, Social Cognition, and Communication Skills in University Students

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Introduction. Fear of Public Speaking or Public Speaking Anxiety is a specific manifestation of Social Anxiety Disorder that can significantly interfere with personal, academic and professional performance. On the other hand, Social Cognition, which includes skills such as emotion recognition, theory of mind, empathy and attributional styles, is fundamental for interpreting the intentions and emotional states of others, facilitating effective communication and adjusting behaviours in different social contexts. In addition, communication skills, which encompass the clear and persuasive expression of ideas and the ability to adapt to social cues, are essential for successful interactions. **Objectives.** The present study aims to analyse the relationship between Fear of Public Speaking, Social Cognition and Communication Skills. **Methodology.** A sample of 436 university students (26% male, 74% female; mean age = 21.1 ± 3.46 years) was obtained through convenience sampling. The tests used were: Social Anxiety Questionnaire for Adults (SAQ-A30), Reading the Mind in the Eyes Test (RMET), Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), Penn Emotion Recognition Task (ER-40), Attribution Style Questionnaire (ASQ), Communication Skills Questionnaire (HABICOM). Multiple regression analyses were performed with SPSS v.29 to assess how different measures of Social Cognition (RMET, IRI, ER-40, ASQ) and Communication Skills (HABICOM) predict the Fear of Public Speaking (SAQ-A30; 'Public Speaking' factor). **Results.** Findings revealed significant relationships between predictor variables and Public Speaking Anxiety. First, a positive association was identified between empathy levels and anxiety, whereas a negative attributional style (particularly internality and globality in negative situations) was linked to a higher propensity to experience this fear. On the other hand, Communication Skills are presented as a relevant protective factor, given that their presence is related to lower levels of Public Speaking Anxiety. Finally, gender is recognised as a significant factor influencing levels of Fear of Public Speaking and some of the processes of Social Cognition. **Discussion.** The results suggest that people with greater empathy may be more vulnerable to social evaluations, while a negative attributional style may intensify the perception of threat. On the other hand, the development of communication skills may decrease barriers to expression, thereby reducing anxiety. These findings underline the importance of working on empathy, strengthening communication skills and modifying attributional style as a strategy to address Fear of Public Speaking in personal, academic and professional contexts.

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