



The Relationship Between Emotional Expression, Bodily Awareness, and Social Problem-Solving Skills with Social Anxiety in Adolescents

Hossein Sharafi Marand^{*1}, Nasrin Mohaddes²

¹ M.A. in Educational Psychology, Department of Psychology, Islamic Azad University, Shabestar Branch, Shabestar, Iran

² Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Islamic Azad University, Shabestar Branch, Shabestar, Iran

10.22034/jmp.2026.602168.1190

Spring 2026, Volume 6, Issue 2, Pages 71 - 78

Abstract

Objective: The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between emotional expression, bodily awareness, and social problem-solving skills with social anxiety among students.

Methods: This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design. The statistical population comprised all male high school students in Marand during the 2024-2025 academic year, from which 331 participants were selected using convenience sampling. Data were collected using the Adolescent Social Anxiety Scale (SAS-A), the Emotional Awareness Questionnaire (EAQ-30), and the Social Problem-Solving Inventory (SPSI). The collected data were analyzed using Pearson correlation coefficients via SPSS version 26 at a significance level of $p < .05$.

Results: The results indicated a significant negative correlation between emotional expression, bodily awareness, and constructive social problem-solving skills with social anxiety ($p < .05$). Furthermore, a significant positive correlation was observed between dysfunctional social problem-solving skills and social anxiety ($p < .05$).

Conclusion: The findings suggest that possessing the ability to appropriately express emotions, having higher levels of bodily awareness, and employing constructive social problem-solving strategies are associated with lower levels of social anxiety in students. In contrast, the use of dysfunctional problem-solving strategies increases the risk of social anxiety. Consequently, designing and implementing educational programs focused on emotional expression, enhancing bodily awareness, and strengthening social problem-solving skills in schools can be an effective step in preventing and reducing social anxiety among adolescents.

Keywords: Bodily Awareness; Emotional Expression; Social Anxiety; Social Problem-Solving

Article Info: Received date 12 Jan. 2026 Revise date 09 Feb. 2026 Accepted date 28 Mar. 2026

Citation: Sharafi Marand, H., Mohaddes, N. (2026). The Relationship Between Emotional Expression, Bodily Awareness, and Social Problem-Solving Skills with Social Anxiety in Adolescents *Journal of Modern Psychology*, 6(2), 71-78. <https://doi.org/10.22034/jmp.2026.602168.1190>

* Corresponding Author.

E-mail: hsynshrfy773@gmail.com



© 2026, The Author(s). Published by Rahman Institute of Higher Education. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>)

1. Introduction

Social anxiety is one of the most prevalent anxiety disorders during childhood and adolescence, characterized by an intense, persistent fear of negative evaluation by others, avoidance of social situations, and the experience of emotional and somatic distress in interpersonal interactions. Typically emerging during school years, if left unidentified and untreated, this disorder can significantly impair academic performance, social relationships, self-esteem, and mental health well into adulthood (American Psychiatric Association, 2022).

Adolescence, due to extensive biological, cognitive, and social transformations, is a critical developmental period for the manifestation of social anxiety. During this stage, the heightened significance of peer acceptance, identity formation, and sensitivity to others' judgments renders adolescents particularly vulnerable to emotional distress (Vriend et al, 2024). Evidence from systematic reviews indicates that a substantial proportion of adult psychological challenges originates from difficulties in emotion regulation and interpersonal relationships during adolescence (Li et al., 2024; Vriend et al., 2024).

In recent years, researchers have increasingly emphasized the role of emotional processes in conceptualizing social anxiety. While classical cognitive-behavioral models have primarily focused on maladaptive cognitions and avoidance behaviors, emerging studies suggest that the ways in which emotions are experienced, perceived, and expressed are fundamental factors in the development and maintenance of social anxiety. Individuals who struggle to accurately identify and express their emotions are more prone to utilizing maladaptive strategies, such as emotional suppression, which may further exacerbate social anxiety (Kashdan et al., 2008; Gill et al., 2018).

A pivotal construct in this domain is emotional expression, which refers to an individual's ability to appropriately articulate both positive and negative feelings; this skill plays a crucial role in shaping interpersonal relationships, eliciting social support, and facilitating emotion regulation. Adolescents who express their emotions in an adaptive manner exhibit greater psychological adjustment compared to those who rely on emotional suppression or avoidance. Furthermore, the quality of peer responses to an adolescent's emotional expression can significantly impact their subsequent emotion regulation and mental health (Fernández et al., 2025; Zupan & Eskritt, 2024).

Another critical variable is body awareness, the ability to detect, attend to, and accurately interpret internal bodily sensations. Individuals with social anxiety often perceive physiological changes, such as increased heart rate, tremors, or perspiration, as threatening, which subsequently intensifies the cycle of anxiety. Conversely, adaptive body awareness can lead to improved emotion regulation, a reduction in the catastrophic misinterpretation of bodily symptoms, and increased psychological flexibility (Vriend et al., 2024; Kashdan et al., 2008).

Furthermore, social problem-solving skills constitute a vital component of adolescent social adjustment. This competency enables individuals to accurately analyze

interpersonal conflicts, generate appropriate solutions, and evaluate the consequences of those solutions. Deficits in social problem-solving are typically associated with avoidance, helplessness, fear of negative evaluation, and heightened social anxiety; conversely, possessing these skills enhances self-efficacy and the quality of social relationships (Li et al., 2024; Gill et al., 2018).

Numerous studies have independently investigated the relationships of emotional expression, body awareness, and social problem-solving skills with student social anxiety. For instance, Hauffe et al. (2024) found that children with social anxiety exhibited poorer emotion regulation and greater emotional reactivity compared to healthy controls. Ernst et al. (2024) demonstrated that socially anxious adolescents evaluate social interactions more negatively and experience greater distress in interpersonal situations. Moreover, Tan et al. (2023) highlighted the mediating role of psychological inflexibility and rejection sensitivity in the relationship between empathy and social anxiety, underscoring the importance of social and problem-solving skills. Similarly, Esmailian et al. (2021) identified emotion regulation and anxiety sensitivity as significant predictors of social anxiety in adolescents.

Despite the growing body of literature on social anxiety, most studies have examined emotional expression, body awareness, or social problem-solving skills in isolation (Tan et al., 2023; Ernst et al., 2024; Hauffe et al., 2024). Research simultaneously evaluating the contribution of these three variables to the explanation of social anxiety in students—particularly within the Iranian context—remains limited (Esmailian et al., 2021). Consequently, examining these factors concurrently could prove instrumental in identifying the mechanisms underlying social anxiety and in designing effective preventive, school-based interventions. Accordingly, the present study aims to investigate the relationships between emotional expression, body awareness, and social problem-solving skills with social anxiety among students.

2. Methods

This section presents the research design, participants, instruments, and procedures of the study.

2.1. Research Design and Participants

The present study employed a descriptive-correlational research design. The statistical population consisted of all male students in the second secondary education level (majoring in Humanities, Experimental Sciences, and Mathematics and Physics) in Marand, during the 2024-2025 academic year. According to the data obtained from the Department of Education, the total population was 2,435. Based on Morgan's table, a sample of 331 students was selected using the convenience sampling method.

2.2. Instruments

The following standardized instruments were used for data collection in the present study.

Emotional Awareness Questionnaire (EAQ-30)

This 30-item scale, developed by Rieffe et al. (2007). This questionnaire consists of six subscales: the ability to distinguish between emotions with 7 items, the ability to share feelings with 3 items, the ability to not conceal emotions with 5 items, bodily (physical) self-awareness with 5 items, attention to the emotions of others with 5 items, and the ability to analyze emotions with 5 items. Participants rate items on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = “Strongly Disagree” to 5 = “Strongly Agree”). Rieffe et al. (2007) reported Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for the subscales ranging from 0.74 to 0.77. In the present study, the emotional expression and body awareness subscales were utilized. Psychometric properties in the Iranian context, as reported by Toghiani and Yousefi (2019), indicate favorable reliability (test-retest coefficients between 0.66 and 0.79) and valid factor structure.

Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents (SAS-A)

Originally developed by La Greca (1998), the 16-item Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents (SAS-A) measures social anxiety across three subscales: fear of negative evaluation (7 items), social avoidance and distress in new situations (5 items), and generalized social avoidance and distress (4 items). Items are rated on a 5-point scale (1 = “Not at all like me” to 5 = “Exactly like me”), with total scores ranging from 16 to 80. The Iranian version, validated by Ostovar and Razavie (2013), demonstrated robust psychometric properties, including a test-retest reliability of 0.88 and Cronbach’s alpha coefficients ranging from 0.74 to 0.84 for subscales.

Social Problem-Solving Inventory-Revised (SPSI-R)

The Social Problem-Solving Inventory-Revised (SPSI-R), developed by D’Zurilla et al. (1982), is a 25-item inventory that assesses two main domains: constructive problem-solving (positive problem orientation and rational problem-solving) and dysfunctional problem-solving (impulsive/careless, avoidance, and negative orientation). Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Constructive items are scored positively, while dysfunctional items are reverse-coded. D’Zurilla et al. reported test-retest reliability ranging from 0.68 to 0.94 and strong construct validity. In Iran, Mokhberi et al. (2011) confirmed a five-factor structure, reporting Cronbach’s alpha coefficients ranging from 0.62 to 0.85 for the various subscales.

2.3. Procedure

Upon obtaining the necessary ethical approvals, 5 out of 17 public high schools in Marand city were randomly selected. The questionnaires were administered via an online platform, and the links were disseminated through school-affiliated Telegram and WhatsApp groups. Participants and their parents were provided with detailed information regarding the study’s purpose, and informed consent was obtained. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained throughout the data collection process. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26). Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were calculated to summarize the data. For inferential statistics,

Pearson’s correlation coefficient and multiple regression analysis were employed to examine the relationships between the variables.

3. Results

The study participants consisted of 331 male high school students. Regarding their fields of study, 109 students (32.9%) were enrolled in Humanities, 136 (41.1%) in Experimental Sciences, and 86 (26.0%) in Mathematics/Physics. Furthermore, the grade distribution was as follows: 108 students (32.6%) in the tenth grade, 112 (33.8%) in the eleventh grade, and 111 (33.6%) in the twelfth grade. Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of the research variables.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

Variables	Mean	St. Deviation
Emotional Expression	56.88	11.24
Body Awareness	64.41	9.89
Effective Problem-Solving	62.33	7.55
Ineffective Problem-Solving	52.46	8.31
Social Anxiety	36.34	7.81

The correlations among emotional expression, body awareness, effective and ineffective problem-solving, and social anxiety are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Correlation Matrix of the Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Emotional Expression	1				
2. Body Awareness	**0.18	1			
3. Effective Problem-Solving	**0.38	**0.48	1		
4. Ineffective Problem-Solving	** -0.67**	** -0.29	** -0.34	1	
5. Social Anxiety	-0.538**	** -0.402	** -0.309	0.191**	1

**P<0.01

The results presented in Table 2 indicate a significant negative correlation between emotional expression, bodily awareness, and constructive problem-solving with social anxiety ($p < 0.01$). Furthermore, a significant positive correlation was observed between dysfunctional problem-solving and social anxiety ($p < 0.01$).

4. Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between emotional expression, body awareness, and social problem-solving skills with social anxiety among students. The findings indicated a negative relationship between social anxiety and emotional expression, body awareness, and effective problem-solving skills. Conversely, a positive relationship was found between ineffective problem-solving skills and social anxiety. These findings align with the results of Ernst (2024), Hauffe et al (2024), Zupan & Eskritt (2024), Barahmand et al (2023), Tan et al (2023), Esmailian et al (2021),

Regarding the negative relationship between emotional expression and social anxiety, it can be argued that adolescents who are capable of expressing their emotions in an appropriate, flexible, and socially adaptive manner are less likely to engage in emotional suppression, rumination, and worry about negative evaluation by others. Healthy emotional expression facilitates social support, enhances the sense of belonging, improves the quality of interpersonal relationships, and reduces emotional arousal—factors that collectively play a role in reducing social anxiety symptoms. Conversely, suppressing or avoiding emotional expression disrupts emotional processing and increases the likelihood of experiencing anxiety in social situations. This finding is consistent with the studies of [Hauffe et al. \(2024\)](#), which demonstrated that difficulties in emotion regulation and expression are among the most significant factors associated with the severity of social anxiety in adolescents.

Additionally, the results showed that body awareness is negatively related to social anxiety. This finding can be explained through theories of interoceptive processing. Adaptive body awareness helps individuals perceive somatic signals, such as increased heart rate, sweating, or muscle tension, without catastrophic interpretations. In contrast, individuals with social anxiety typically interpret these physiological changes as signs of failure, embarrassment, or negative judgment by others, which in turn exacerbates the cycle of anxiety. Therefore, more accurate and acceptance-based body awareness enhances the ability to regulate emotions and control anxiety responses. This explanation is congruent with [Kashdan's \(2008\)](#) findings regarding the lived experience of the body in social anxiety, as well as contemporary models of emotion regulation.

Another finding of the study showed that effective social problem-solving skills are negatively related to social anxiety. Adolescents possessing effective problem-solving skills evaluate challenging social situations as manageable problems and employ rational strategies, planning, decision-making, and consequence evaluation instead of avoidance. This process enhances self-efficacy, perceived control, and social self-confidence, thereby reducing the likelihood of experiencing social anxiety. According to D'Zurilla and Nezu's social problem-solving theory, individuals with a positive problem orientation experience less psychological distress in social situations and exhibit higher psychological adaptation ([D'Zurilla et al., 1982](#)).

In contrast, the positive relationship between ineffective social problem-solving and social anxiety suggests that relying on strategies such as avoidance, impulsivity, helplessness, hurried decision-making, or an inability to evaluate behavioral consequences renders adolescents more vulnerable in social situations. These individuals often evaluate social interactions as threatening, have low confidence in their ability to manage situations, and consequently experience greater anxiety. Over time, the repetition of this dysfunctional pattern reinforces negative beliefs about oneself and others, maintaining the cycle of social anxiety. This explanation is consistent with the findings of [Ernst et al. \(2024\)](#) regarding the daily experiences of adolescents with social anxiety.

In sum, the findings of the present study indicate that students' social anxiety is not solely the product of cognitive factors; rather, it is influenced by the interaction of emotional expression capacity, the quality of body awareness, and social problem-solving styles. Therefore, designing school-based interventions focused on training emotional expression, promoting body awareness, and strengthening social problem-solving skills can be effective in preventing and reducing social anxiety in students.

Consequently, it is suggested that future studies replicate this research with both genders and in other geographical regions. It is also recommended that experimental studies be conducted in the field of social anxiety to determine the direct impact of training social problem-solving skills, emotional expression, and body awareness on reducing social anxiety symptoms.

5. Conclusion

Like any other study, the present research was subject to several limitations. First, the findings are limited in terms of gender and geographic location, as the sample consisted solely of male senior high school students in Marand County. Second, variables such as socioeconomic status and intelligence level were not controlled, which could have influenced the research outcomes. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of the study and the use of online questionnaires are other limitations that might have affected the results.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to everyone who helped with this research.

Conflict of interest

The authors report no potential conflicts of interest.

References

- American Psychiatric Association. (2022). *Understanding mental disorders: Your guide to DSM-5-TR* (2nd ed.). American Psychiatric Association. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9781615375219>
- Barahmand, U., Shamsina, N., Rojas, K., Geschwind, N., & Iya, F. H. (2023). Mechanisms linking perfectionism and social anxiety: The role of hostility and disqualification of positive social outcomes. *Journal of Psychiatric Practice*, 29(2), 94–103. <https://doi.org/10.1097/PRA.0000000000000700>
- D'Zurilla, T.J., & Nezu, A.M. (1982). social problem solving in adults. In P.C. Kendall (Ed.). *Advances in cognitive-behavioral research and therapy* (vol.) New York: Academic Press.
- Ernst, J., Ollmann, T. M., König, E., Pieper, L., Voss, C., Hoyer, J., Rückert, F., Knappe, S., & Beesdo-Baum, K. (2023). Social anxiety in adolescents and young adults from the general population: An epidemiological characterization of fear and avoidance in different social situations. *Current Psychology: A Journal for Diverse Perspectives on Diverse Psychological Issues*, 42(32), 28130–28145. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-03755-y>
- Esmailian, marziye, mohamadkhani, shahram, Hasani, jafar. (2021). Structural equation modeling of mindfulness skills, emotion regulation and anxiety sensitivity with social anxiety in

- Adolescent. *Knowledge & Research in Applied Psychology*, 22 (1). 121-134. <https://sanad.iau.ir/en/Journal/jsrp/Article/895090>
- Fernández, I., Vallina-Fernández, Ó., Alonso-Bada, S., Rus-Calafell, M., & Paino, M. (2025). Emotional regulation as a mediating variable between risk of psychosis and common mental health problems in adolescents. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 181, 273–281. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychires.2024.11.058>
- Gill C, Watson L, Williams C, Chan SWY. (2018). Social anxiety and self-compassion in adolescents. *Journal of Adolesc*; 69:163-174. [www.doi:10.1016/j.adolescence.2018.10.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2018.10.004)
- Hauffe, V., Vierrath, V., Tuschen-Caffier, B., & Schmitz, J. (2024). Daily-life reactivity and emotion regulation in children with social anxiety disorder. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 106, 102907. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.janxdis.2024.102907>
- Kashdan, T. B., & Roberts, J. E. (2008). Social anxiety, depressive symptoms, and post-event rumination: Affective consequences and social contextual influences. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 21(3), 284–301. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.janxdis.2006.05.009>
- La Greca, A., & Lopez, N. (1998). Social Anxiety among Adolescents: Linkages with Peer Relations and Friendships. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 26, 83-94. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1022684520514>
- Li, Y., Tang, H., Dong, W., Lu, G., & Chen, C. (2024). Association between childhood trauma and social anxiety in adolescents: The mediating role of self-compassion and loneliness. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 158, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2024.107109>
- Mokhberi, A. , dortaj, F. and dorekordi, A. (2011). Questionnaire, psychometrics, and standardization of indicators of social problem-solving ability. *Quarterly of Educational Measurement*, 2(4), 1-21. https://jem.atu.ac.ir/article_2665.html
- Ostovar, S., & Razavie, A. (2013). The Study of Psychometric Properties of Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents (SAS-A) for Use in Iran. *Psychological Models and Methods*, 3(vol 3/ no 12), 69-78. https://jpmm.marvdasht.iau.ir/article_292.html?lang=en
- Rieffe, C., Meerum Terwogt, M., Petrides, K.V., Cowan, C., Miers, A.C., Tolland, A. (2007). Psychometric properties of the Emotion Awareness Questionnaire for children. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 43, 95-105. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2006.11.015>
- Tan, X., Yang, Y., & Yu, M. (2023). Longitudinal relationship of empathy and social anxiety among adolescents: The mediation roles of psychological inflexibility and rejection sensitivity. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 339, 867–876. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2023.07.069>
- Toghyani, E. and Yousefi, R. (2019). Psychometric Properties of Persian Version of Emotion Awareness Questionnair. *Quarterly of Educational Measurement*, 10(35), 213-232. https://jem.atu.ac.ir/article_10198.html?lang=en
- Vriend E, Moeijes J, Scheffers M. (2024). Efficacy of psychomotor therapy for children and adolescents with anxiety disorders-a systematic literature review. *Front Child Adolesc Psychiatry*.8;2. [www.doi:10.3389/frcha.2023.1182188](https://doi.org/10.3389/frcha.2023.1182188)
- Zupan, B., Eskritt, M. (2024). Facial and Vocal Emotion Recognition in Adolescence: A Systematic Review. *Adolescent Res Rev* 9, 253–277. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40894-023-00219-7>