



Examining the Relationship between Social Anxiety and Social Engagement with Peers among Young Adults with ASD

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BACKGROUND

- Prior research suggests that social anxiety is the most frequently reported form of anxiety among individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) (Pugliese et al. 2013).
- Research also indicates that this population exhibits less social engagement with peers in comparison to their typically developing counterparts (Koegel et al. 2012).
- While the relationship between social anxiety and low levels of social engagement in children with ASD has been established (Chang, Quan, & Wood 2012), little is known about the relationship between these two variables for young adults with ASD.
- Understanding the relationship between social anxiety and social engagement among young adults with ASD may be useful to help clinicians understand factors contributing to social isolation and limited social interactions with peers.

OBJECTIVE & HYPOTHESIS

- The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between social anxiety and social engagement with peers among young adults with ASD.
- It is hypothesized that social anxiety among young adults with ASD will be negatively correlated with frequency of social engagement as indicated by the total number of get-togethers with peers.

PARTICIPANTS

- N=125 young adults with ASD presenting for treatment at the UCLA Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills (PEERS®; Laugeson 2017), an evidence-based, caregiver-assisted social skills intervention (Laugeson et al. 2015)
- Gender: 74.4% male ($n=93$), 25.6% female ($n=32$)
- Age: $M=22.19$, $SD=3.65$, range=17-35
- Ethnicity: Caucasian 64.8% ($n=81$), Latino/Hispanic 10.4% ($n=13$), African-American 0.8% ($n=1$), Asian 11.2% ($n=14$), Native American 0.8% ($n=1$), Middle-Eastern 1.6% ($n=2$), Other 8.8% ($n=11$) and Unspecified 1.6% ($n=2$)

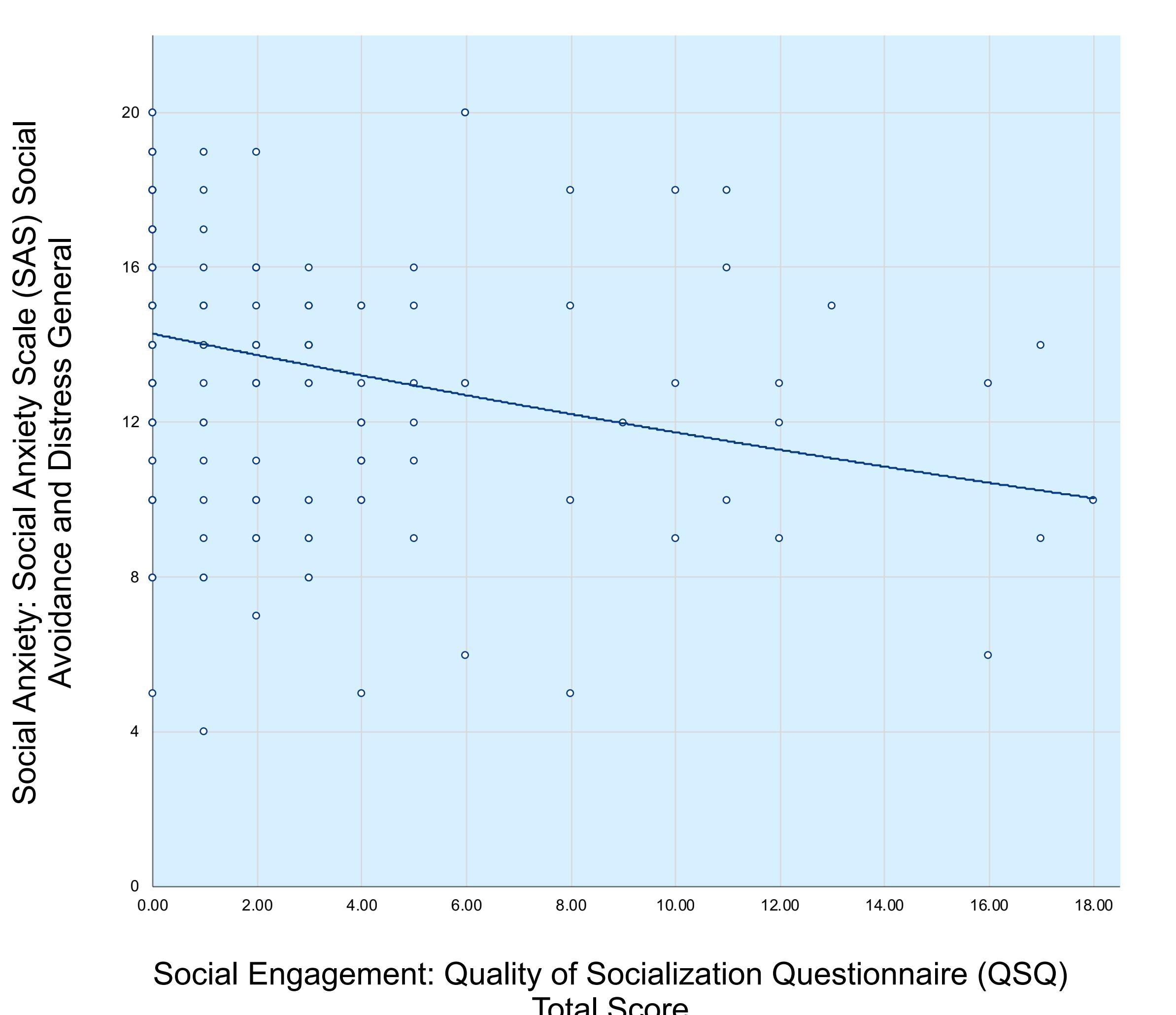
PROCEDURES

- All participants had clinically elevated ASD symptoms at baseline, as indicated by a Total Score ≥ 60 on the Social Responsiveness Scale-Second Edition (SRS-2; Constantino & Gruber 2012).
- In order to assess social anxiety at baseline, caregivers completed the Social Anxiety Scale (SAS; La Greca 1999).
- To assess frequency of social engagement at baseline, caregivers also completed the Quality of Socialization Questionnaire (QSQ; Laugeson 2017), which measures the total number of hosted and invited get-togethers with peers in the previous month.
- Caregiver data was analyzed using Pearson bivariate correlation coefficients.

RESULTS

- Pearson correlations revealed no significant relationship between total scores on the SAS and total number of get-togethers on the QSQ.
- However, a significant correlation was observed between scores on the Social Avoidance and Distress General subscale of the SAS and total number of hosted and invited get-togethers on the QSQ ($r=-.22$; $p<.05$), suggesting that different aspects of social anxiety have a stronger influence on social engagement than others.

Correlation between Total Number of Get-Togethers and Social Avoidance and Distress General



	Social Engagement (QSQ) Total Score		
	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>n</i>
SAS – Total	-.083	< .357	125
SAS – FNE	-.006	< .943	125
SAS – SAD New	-.064	< .479	125
SAS – SAD Gen	-.223*	< .012	125

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)
FNE = Fear of Negative Evaluation; SAD New = Social Avoidance and Distress New; SAD Gen = Social Avoidance and Distress General

DISCUSSION

- Although there was no significant relationship between overall social anxiety and frequency of social engagement among young adults with ASD, results indicate that everyday experiences of social avoidance and distress are significantly correlated with the frequency of get-togethers with peers among this population.
- Interestingly, the other subscales of the SAS, both Fear of Negative Evaluation and Social Avoidance and Distress New, did not yield significant findings in relation to frequency of social engagement.
- These findings suggest that different aspects of social anxiety vary in their relationship with the frequency of social engagement among young adults with ASD.
- This study supports the need for targeted interventions for young adults with ASD to decrease feelings of social anxiety, specifically general feelings of social avoidance and distress, in order to increase the frequency of social engagement through hosted and invited get-togethers with peers.
- Future research might examine how the relationship between social anxiety and social engagement among young adults with ASD differs across parent- and self-reports.

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