

Social Anxiety Among Generation Z in Bandung: A Descriptive Cross-Sectional Study

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Abstract

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Background: Generation Z is a group raised in a digital ecosystem and exposed to social media early on. Their dependence on online interactions makes them vulnerable to social comparison and digital social pressure. This condition risks reinforcing patterns of social avoidance associated with social anxiety. **Aim:** To describe the level of social anxiety among Generation Z in Bandung City based on the variables of gender, age, employment status, duration of social media use, and type of social media used. **Method:** The method used is a descriptive quantitative approach with a cross-sectional design. Data were collected using an online questionnaire and the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS-SR) from 8 to 15 May 2025, and were subsequently analyzed using descriptive statistical methods to categorize the levels of social anxiety among Generation Z in Bandung. **Results:** Most respondents were found to experience social anxiety in the moderate category, with 56.38% classified as moderate, followed by 21.58% marked and 18.06% mild. The moderate level also dominated across gender, age, employment status, duration of social media use, and preferred platforms, indicating that moderate social anxiety is consistently the most prevalent among Generation Z in Bandung. **Conclusion:** These results reflect that social anxiety is a fairly common issue among Generation Z and tends to be evenly distributed across various individual characteristics and digital behaviors. This study recommends the need for education regarding healthy social media use and strengthening social skills to prevent the development of more severe social anxiety symptoms.

Keywords: Generation Z, mental health, social anxiety, social media



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Introduction

Social anxiety is a psychological disorder characterised by excessive fear of certain social situations, where the individual feels that he or she will be judged negatively or embarrass themselves in front of other people (Crome et al., 2015). In clinical psychology terminology, this condition was previously called *social phobia* in DSM-IV and is now classified as *social anxiety disorder* in DSM-V, to reflect a broader spectrum of

symptoms (Crome et al., 2015). According to Liebowitz (1987), Social anxiety encompasses two main dimensions: fear and Avoidance. The fear dimension refers to the dread that arises when interacting in social situations, while Avoidance describes an individual's tendency to avoid such situations to reduce discomfort or embarrassment.

The phenomenon of social anxiety is not just an individual psychological issue, but has become a global mental health problem, particularly among the productive

age group. Global meta-analyses show that the prevalence of social anxiety continues to increase, with estimates reaching 4.7% in children, 8.3% in adolescents, and up to 17% in young adults (Polanczyk et al., 2015b). A cross-country study by Jefferies & Ungar (2020) even noted that around 36% of respondents aged 16–29 years experienced moderate to severe social anxiety symptoms.

This condition is also found in Indonesia. According to the 2022 INAMHS survey, one in three Indonesian adolescents experiences mental health problems, and 3.7% of them are identified as having social anxiety (Gloria, 2022). Study Vriends et al., (2013) further strengthens these findings by showing that Indonesian students have higher levels of social anxiety than Swiss students, with 15.8% categorised as severe. This finding suggests that social anxiety has become a public mental health issue in a collectivist country like Indonesia.

Social anxiety significantly impacts various aspects of life, from education and social relationships to the workplace. Individuals with social anxiety are at higher risk of bullying, dropping out of school, and having limited access to social relationships and marriage. They also experience more frequent absenteeism and decreased work performance (Jefferies & Ungar, 2020).

Factors that play a role in the emergence of social anxiety include interactions between individuals, the social environment, and ways of communicating (Jefferies & Ungar, 2020). Technological advances have dramatically changed interactions between individuals, social environments, and communication methods. This has also been facilitated by the emergence of social media, which allows everyone to interact and communicate with anyone around the world.

Besides the positive impacts of social media, previous research has shown a significant relationship between social media use and social anxiety. Hernández et al. 2024, Cristóbal Hernández et al., 2024) in their study of 3,219 young adults in Chile found that internet addiction significantly predicted increased symptoms of social anxiety. A meta-analysis conducted by In et al. (2024), Yuanfeixue Nan et al., (2024), Lai et al., (2023), which included over 38,000 participants, also showed a positive correlation between social media use and social anxiety. However, several other studies have shown inconsistent results, likely influenced by population factors, the platforms used, and moderating variables such as age and gender (Cristóbal Hernández et al., 2024, Hernández et al., 2024, Nan et al., 2024).

This is particularly relevant in Generation Z, a group of individuals born and raised alongside the development of digital technology, including social media. This generation uses social media as a communication tool and a space for self-expression,

seeking social validation, and building a personal identity (Ertan, 2020). However, high intensity of social media use has the potential to disrupt face-to-face social skills and foster avoidance patterns in direct interactions, which can ultimately develop into social anxiety (Cristóbal Hernández et al., 2024, Hernández et al., 2024, Jefferies & Ungar, 2020).

Generation Z in Bandung is a particularly relevant group in this context. The city is a hub for digital growth and education, with high levels of technology engagement among teenagers and young adults. Bandung, one of the cities with the highest digital engagement in Indonesia, had an Indonesian Digital Society Index (IMDI) of 52.99 in 2024, and the highest digital economic literacy score of 5.34 (Fraenkel et al., 2012). This figure reflects the high level of public exposure to social media, especially among Generation Z. This research is important to understand the dynamics of social anxiety experienced by Generation Z in Bandung, who grew up in a very different digital and social environment than the previous generation. This research highlights the unique experiences of Generation Z, who grew up in the digital age, and how these conditions affect their social anxiety. Based on this phenomenon, this study aims to describe the level of social anxiety among Generation Z in Bandung based on gender, age, type of social media use, occupation, and duration of social media use. By quantitatively understanding the distribution of social anxiety in this group, the results are hoped to inform more targeted preventive interventions.

Methods

This study uses quantitative methods with a descriptive and associative approach to describe the level of social anxiety among Generation Z in Bandung City and its relationship to gender, age, type of social media used, occupation, and duration of social media use. The design used is cross-sectional, where data is collected at a specific time, thus efficiently describing distribution patterns and relationships between variables.

The population in this study was Generation Z in Bandung City. The minimum sample size was calculated using G*Power, which indicated that 217 participants were required to achieve a statistical power of 0.80 at $\alpha = 0.05$. The analysis produced $df = 215$ and a critical t -value of 1.65, confirming that the final sample of 227 respondents exceeded the required threshold. The sampling technique used was convenience sampling. The characteristics of the research respondents were that they resided in Bandung City and were aged 12-27 years. Data was collected using a questionnaire distributed to respondents via a Google Forms page. The research

instrument used was the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale – Self Report (LSAS-SR) to measure social anxiety. The total LSAS-SR score showed a reliability value 0.92, indicating very high internal consistency. The LSAS-SR subscale Fear, which measures an individual's level of fear in social situations, had a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.88, indicating high internal consistency. Meanwhile, the LSAS-SR subscale Avoidance, which assesses the level of Avoidance of social situations, has a reliability value of 0.84, which is also quite good. The data obtained were analysed descriptively to see the distribution of respondents' social anxiety levels based on the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS) score.

Although ethical approval was not sought for this research, the study was implemented in compliance with ethical guidelines, particularly with respect to informed consent, privacy protection, and respect for participants' autonomy.

Results

The majority of respondents were female, as many as 179 people (78.86%), age in the adult category as many as 208 people (91.63%), employment status as students as many as 204 people (89.86%), have a duration of social media use of 6-8 hours per day as many as 133 people (58.59%), and the social media used most is WhatsApp as many as 215 people (94.7%) (see table 1).

Table 1 Distribution of respondents' frequencies based on gender, age, employment status, duration of social media use, and social media used (n=227)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Man	48	21.145
Woman	179	78.86
Age		
Teenagers	50	5.73
Mature	214	94.27
Employment status		
Student	204	89,86
Not yet working	3	1,32
Already working	20	8,81
Duration of time spent using social media		
6-8 hours per day	133	58.59
9-12 hours per day	70	30.83
More than 13 hours per day	24	10.57
Social media used		
WhatsApp	215	94,7
Instagram	209	92,1
TikTok	190	83,7
Total	227	100.00

Table 2 Social anxiety data (n=227)

Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
You Do Not Suffer from Social Anxiety	0	0
Mild Social Anxiety	41	18.06
Moderate Social Anxiety	128	56.38
Marked Social Anxiety	49	21.58
Severe Social Anxiety	9	3.96
Very Severe Social Anxiety	0	0
Total	227	100.00

Based on Table 2, the majority of respondents experienced moderate social anxiety, namely 128 people (56.38%).

Table 3 Social anxiety categories towards gender

Gender	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Man	Marked social Anxiety	14	29.16
	Mild social Anxiety	7	14.58
	Moderate social Anxiety	24	50.00
	Severe social Anxiety	3	6.25
Total		48	100.00
Woman	Marked social Anxiety	35	19.55
	Mild social Anxiety	34	18.99
	Moderate social Anxiety	104	58.10
	Severe social Anxiety	6	3.35
Total		179	100.00

The majority of male respondents (24 people) experienced moderate social anxiety. Similarly, the majority of female respondents (104 people) experienced moderate social anxiety (Table 3).

Table 4 Social anxiety categories by age

Age (Group)	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Teenagers	Mild social Anxiety	38	92,68
	Moderate social Anxiety	8	6,32
	Marked social Anxiety	4	8,42
	Severe social Anxiety	0	0,00
	Total	50	100,00
Mature	Mild social Anxiety	3	1,40
	Moderate social Anxiety	120	56,07
	Marked social Anxiety	45	21,03
	Severe social Anxiety	9	4,21
Total		214	100,00

Based on Table 4, the majority of teenagers experience social anxiety in the category *Mild*, as many as

38 people (92.68%), and in adulthood, the majority of respondents were in the adult category *Moderate*, as many as 120 people (56.07%).

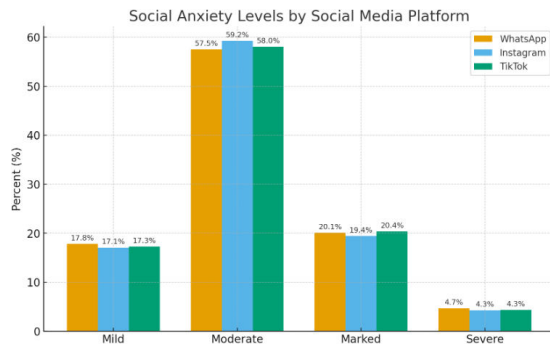


Diagram 1 Social anxiety categories towards social media types

Based on [diagram 1](#), of the three most popular social media platforms among participants, namely WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok, the majority of users experience social anxiety in the category *Moderate*, with a percentage between 57-59%.

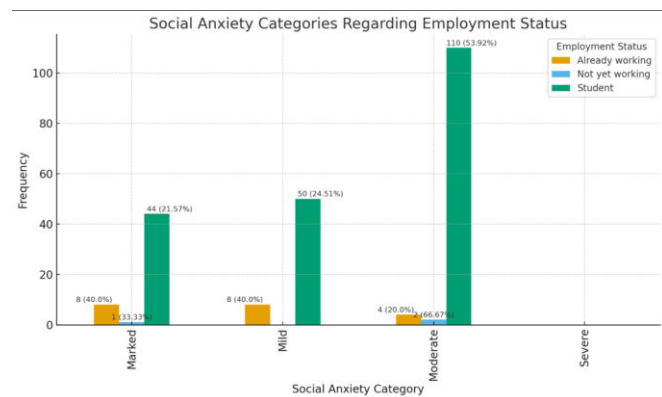


Diagram 2 Social anxiety categories regarding employment status

Based on data from [diagram 2](#), respondents who are still students experience social anxiety in the category *Moderate* as many as 110 people (53.92%). Respondents who were already working experienced social anxiety at the *Marked* level as many as 8 people (40%). Meanwhile, the majority of respondents who are not yet working experience social anxiety in the category *Moderate* as many as 2 people (66.67%). The majority of respondents who spend 6-8 hours on social media per day are in the social anxiety category. *Moderate*, namely 75 people (56.39%). Respondents who spend 9-12 hours per day on social media are most likely to be at the social anxiety level.

Moderate As many as 40 people (57.14%). Similarly, respondents who use social media more than 13 hours per day ([Diagram 3](#)).

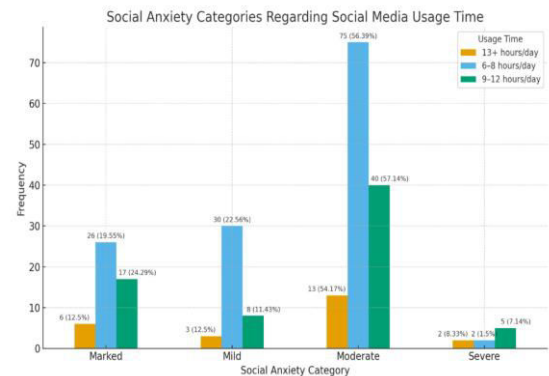


Diagram 3 Social anxiety categories regarding social media usage time

Discussion

Based on the data in Table 1, all respondents in this study had social anxiety, with the majority of respondents, namely 56.38%, being in the category *Moderate Social Anxiety*. According to Urban et al. (2024), and Urbán et al., (2024), social anxiety can lead to Avoidance of face-to-face interactions, thus causing difficulties in initiating and maintaining social relationships effectively. Thus, these findings indicate that Generation Z in this study has a relatively high vulnerability to social stress, especially in face-to-face interactions, which can affect their psychological well-being and social functioning in everyday environments.

This can be explained by the fact that Generation Z is a generation that grew up amidst technological advancements and has had extensive exposure to social media since childhood. They are emotionally active in using it for entertainment, learning, and self-expression, focusing on establishing a digital identity (Ertan, 2020). This intense exposure can shift their comfort from in-person interactions to online communication, increasing the risk of social anxiety in face-to-face situations.

The results of this study indicate that most respondents were students and young adults in a crucial developmental phase, namely the formation of self-identity and the search for social standing. Pressures from academic and social environments, coupled with the influence of social media, which emphasises image standards and comparisons, further reinforce this tendency (Alkatiri & Aprianty, 2024, & Ertan, 2020). Thus, the high level of social anxiety in Generation Z in this study is not only related to internal factors, but is also influenced by the digital environment and the psychosocial development demands they face.

The results of the study also showed that both male

and female respondents mainly experienced social anxiety in the category *moderate*, with a higher percentage in women (58.10%) than in men (50.00%). This indicates that gender can be a factor influencing the level of social anxiety, although the distribution is relatively similar. In the study by Jefferies & Ungar, (2020), it was stated that differences in social experiences, cultural expectations, and emotional management between men and women can play a role in the intensity of perceived anxiety. However, in the context of this study, these differences did not show statistical significance, indicating that gender may not be a strong enough predictor of social anxiety on its own.

Based on age category, the majority of adult respondents experienced social anxiety at a *moderate level* (56.07%) compared to adolescent respondents who experienced anxiety at a *mild level* (92.68%). This is in line with the findings of Polanczyk et al., (2015a), which show that the prevalence of social anxiety increases with age. In early adulthood, the demands of more complex social roles such as higher education, employment, and deeper social relationships can trigger psychosocial stressors that increase the risk of social anxiety. Meanwhile, although adolescents also face social pressures, their context of responsibility is still relatively limited, so the anxiety they experience remains mild.

Most of the respondents in this study were students (89.86%), and among them, the highest level of social anxiety was in the category of *moderate* (53.92%). Interestingly, respondents who were already working showed the highest distribution in the category *marked social anxiety* (44%), while respondents who are not yet working (n=3) are mainly in the category *moderate* (66.67%). These findings suggest that while work can provide stability in social and economic identity, for the Gen Z age group, the world of work can also be a source of significant new stress. Jefferies & Ungar (2020) explained that the transition to work for individuals with limited social skills can increase feelings of inadequacy or inferiority, contributing to high levels of social anxiety.

The data shows that regardless of the duration of social media use, whether 6-8 hours, 9-12 hours, or more than 13 hours per day, the category of social anxiety *moderate* remained dominant with percentages above 54% for each group. This indicates that intense social media use (>6 hours/day) consistently correlates with an increased risk of social anxiety. Hernández et al. (2024) and Cristóbal Hernández et al., (2024) found that internet addiction significantly predicted increased symptoms of social anxiety, and this pattern is also reflected in this study. Longer duration indicates higher emotional involvement, especially in Gen Z, who actively use social media to construct a digital identity, thus increasing the

likelihood of social comparison and the need for external validation (Ertan, 2020).

The results of the study showed that on the three leading social media platforms (WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok), the majority of users experienced moderate social anxiety, with a percentage range of 57–59%. This strengthens the findings of the meta-analysis by In et al. (2024) and Lai et al., (2023). There is a consistent positive correlation between social media use and social anxiety. While each platform has different interaction characteristics, all contain elements that can potentially trigger feelings of judgment or comparison. For example, Instagram and TikTok, which are visually-based, are heavily associated with appearance and self-image, while WhatsApp, while more private, still involves expectations of responsiveness and constant social interaction. Jefferies & Ungar (2020) stated that exposure to digital social pressure can reinforce real-life avoidance patterns, which are characteristic of social anxiety.

Limitation

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the use of convenience sampling limits generalizability beyond the respondents who voluntarily participated in the online survey. Second, the cross-sectional design prevents causal conclusions regarding the relationship between social media use and social anxiety; longitudinal studies would be needed to determine directionality. Third, the study relied solely on self-report instruments, which may be influenced by social desirability bias or inaccurate self-perception. Fourth, the sample was heavily dominated by students, which may limit representation of other subgroups within Generation Z, such as full-time workers or individuals not in education. Lastly, social media variables were measured through broad categories (duration and platform type) without assessing nuanced behaviors such as passive browsing, content creation, or specific interaction patterns that may differentially influence social anxiety.

Conclusion

This study revealed that the majority of Generation Z respondents in Bandung City experienced moderate levels of social anxiety, with no significant differences between groups based on gender, age, employment status, duration of social media use, or type of platform used. However, the tendency for social anxiety appeared higher among adults, women, employed individuals, and those who used social media longer. These results indicate that social anxiety is a relatively widespread psychological issue

among Gen Z, with potential links to demographic characteristics and digital behaviour, although not directly causal.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

No conflict of interest to declare.

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Author's Contribution

NAP: contributed to the study's conception and design, data acquisition, and data analysis, wrote the first draft of the manuscript. RHP: Research supervision; study design and methodology; data analysis guidance. YC: Revised the final draft, and gave final approval of the version to be published.

Data Availability Statement

The dataset generated during and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of Use of AI in Academic Writing

The author used ChatGPT/Gemini in the writing process to improve readability and remove grammatical errors. However, he took full responsibility for the content.

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