

New study reveals links between social anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts in adolescents

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Adolescents who experience higher levels of social anxiety symptoms are more likely to report increased suicidal thoughts and other depressive

symptoms two years later, according to new research.

The University of East Anglia-led study sheds light on the pressing need for early interventions to address social anxiety in young people. The study, "Social anxiety symptoms and their relationship with [suicidal ideation](#) and depressive symptoms in adolescents: A prospective study," is published in *JCPP Advances*.

Lead author Dr. Kenny Chiu, Clinical Lecturer in Clinical Psychology at UEA's Department of Clinical Psychology and Psychological Therapies, said, "Social anxiety disorder (SAD) often begins during adolescence, manifesting as intense fear and discomfort in social situations.

"This study provides valuable insights into how social anxiety symptoms may convey risks to developing other important mental health issues if left unaddressed."

Second author Prof Argyris Stringaris, Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at University College London, said, "Our findings suggest addressing social anxiety early could be crucial in preventing the development of suicidal thoughts and other depressive symptoms."

Depressive symptoms one year into the study also partially explained the connection between early social anxiety and later depressive symptoms.

Last author Dr. Eleanor Leigh, MRC Clinician Scientist Fellow at University of Oxford and Honorary Associate Professor at University College London, said, "Our findings highlight that social anxiety plays a significant role in the persistence of [depressive symptoms](#) in adolescents."

The study builds on a meta-analytic review led by Dr. Eleanor Leigh, Dr. Kenny Chiu, and Dr. Elizabeth Ballard, which highlighted the lack of

longitudinal research looking at the relationship between social anxiety and [suicidal thoughts](#) in adolescents.

The study analyzed data from the Wellcome Trust Neuroscience in Psychiatry Network (NSPN) 2,400 cohort dataset.

This accelerated [longitudinal study](#) recruited more than 2,400 young people aged between 14 and 24 from London and Cambridgeshire areas between 2012 and 2017.

Participants were assessed over a two-year period, once at the outset, another a year later, and the final one at the end of two years.

Dr. Chiu said, "Such a discovery would not have been possible without the NSPN consortium, which provides robust data accessible to child and adolescent mental health researchers."

More information: Social anxiety symptoms and their relationship with suicidal ideation and depressive symptoms in adolescents: A prospective study, *JCPP Advances* (2024).

Provided by University of East Anglia

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