



The Effects of Social Anxiety Disorder on Personal Relationships: Survey Results

Social anxiety disorder can wreak havoc on the social and romantic lives of the 15 million American adults who suffer from the disorder, leaving them isolated, ashamed and in some cases, misdiagnosed, according to a new survey commissioned by the Anxiety Disorders Association of America (ADAA) and conducted by Harris Interactive.

Overview

Social anxiety disorder (SAD) is a serious medical condition that has a severe negative impact on the lives of most of those who have been diagnosed with it. The disorder affects many aspects of daily life including relationships with family and friends and happiness with career or job.

SAD has a negative impact on:

- Personal relationships (87%)
- Ability to carry out normal daily activities (75%)
- Level of satisfaction with career or work (73%)

Most adults with SAD avoid and miss out on events and opportunities that they might otherwise enjoy, such as social events with their family and friends. The symptoms can also cause misunderstandings with family and friends, who may not understand why their loved one seems to be avoiding them.

SAD symptoms result in:

- Avoiding events they wanted to attend (82%)
- Missed social opportunities with family and friends (78%)
- Misunderstandings with friends and family (66%)

In addition to making interactions with others difficult, SAD also affects how adults with the disorder think about themselves. Many adults with the disorder feel as though they are not in control of their own lives, and some feel they are not capable of surviving on their own. Most with the disorder are embarrassed by their disorder and do not want anyone to think they are crazy or to know they have an illness.

- 59% often worry about their condition.
- 56% feel as though they have no control over their lives.
- 43% feel they cannot survive on their own.
- Almost 7 in 10 (69%) do not want anyone to think they are crazy.
- About 6 in 10 (58%) don't want anyone to know they have an illness.
- 58% are embarrassed by their disorder.

Most adults with SAD feel like they are alone and that no one understands the way they feel. About half say their family and friends think they should be able to overcome the disorder on their own, and a minority even feel that their doctor does not take their symptoms seriously.

- 68% say they feel alone.
- 66% say no one understands how they feel.
- About half (51%) say their friends and family think they should be able to overcome the disorder by themselves.
- 2 in 10 (20%) think their doctor does not take their symptoms seriously.

A majority of adults with SAD recognize they need help learning to manage their disorder, and many do not think they should be expected to manage their symptoms without medication.

- 75% say they need help learning to manage their disorder.
- 56% feel their symptoms prevent them from leading a fulfilling life.
- About 4 in 10 (41%) do not think they should be able to manage their illness without medication.

Impact on Romantic Relationships

When left untreated, the symptoms of SAD have a negative impact on a person's ability to have a romantic relationship. For some with the disorder, the symptoms have a major negative impact.

- About three-quarters (77%) of adults with SAD say their symptoms have a negative impact on their ability to have a romantic relationship.
- About a quarter (26%) say it has a major negative impact.

Most with the disorder have disappointed a spouse or significant other due to actions that resulted from symptoms of the disorder. A minority of those with the disorder have even tried to keep their condition a secret from a romantic partner. Many adults with the disorder avoid activities with romantic partners and lie or make excuses to explain their behavior. For some, the symptoms cause an inability to maintain a romantic relationship. Some others avoid being intimate with their partner because of their symptoms.

- 62% have disappointed a spouse or significant other because their symptoms make them go to great lengths to avoid certain situations.
- About 2 in 10 (22%) have kept their disorder a secret from a spouse or significant other.
- SAD symptoms have resulted in:
 - Avoiding going places with spouse or significant other (62%)
 - Avoiding social activities with spouse or significant other (56%)
 - Making excuses or lying to compensate for behavior (54%)
 - Cancelling a date at the last minute (40%)
 - Inability to maintain a relationship (37%)
 - Avoiding intimacy with spouse or significant other (35%)

Despite the difficulty SAD can cause in romantic relationships, most adults with the disorder who are currently in romantic relationships have healthy relationships and are able to provide the support that their partner needs. For many, this success can be partially attributed to the understanding and support of their spouse or significant other.

- 87% of those with SAD who are married or in a romantic relationship report having a healthy relationship with their spouse or significant other.
- 76% say their spouse or significant other has been a great help in managing their disorder.
- About 7 in 10 (73%) are able to provide the support their spouse or significant other needs.
- About half (51%) rely on their spouse or significant other to help them accomplish common daily tasks.

Fortunately, most adults who are currently being treated for SAD say the treatment has a positive impact on their ability to have a romantic relationship. Some even report a major positive impact.

- 59% of adults currently being treated for their disorder report a positive impact on their ability to have a romantic relationship.
 - About a quarter (28%) say their treatment has had a major positive impact.

Impact on Friendships

The symptoms of SAD often have a negative impact on friendships, making a possible source of support difficult for many with the disorder. The majority of adults with SAD say their symptoms have a negative impact on their friendships. For some, this is a major impact. A majority of adults with the disorder have avoided events with friends because of their symptoms, and many have lost touch with friends.

- About 8 in 10 (78%) adults with SAD say their symptoms have a negative impact on their friendships.
 - A quarter (25%) say it has a major negative impact.
- SAD symptoms have resulted in:
 - Avoiding social activities with friends (83%)
 - Avoiding going places with friends (83%)
 - Losing touch with friends (65%)
 - Not returning or answering friends' phone calls (62%)

SAD symptoms can be so difficult to overcome that over half of adults with the disorder do not have any close friends. Many adults with the disorder feel their friends do not take their condition seriously and others feel their friends are uncomfortable when they talk about it. This may have resulted in about half keeping their disorder a secret from their friends.

- Around half (55%) have no close friends.
- Half (50%) have kept their symptoms a secret from their friends.
- 42% say their friends do not take their disorder seriously.
- 42% feel their friends are uncomfortable when they talk about their disorder.

Fortunately, most adults who are currently being treated say their treatment has made a positive impact on their friendships. Some even experience a major positive impact on their friendships as a result of their treatment.

- Around 6 in 10 (62%) say their treatment has made a positive impact on their friendships.
 - About a third (35%) say their treatment has had a major positive impact on their friendships.

Impact on Professional Relationships

The symptoms of SAD also cause difficulty in the professional lives of most of those who have the disorder. Many adults with the disorder report a negative impact on their professional relationships when their symptoms are untreated. Some report their symptoms have a major negative impact.

- 6 in 10 (60%) adults with SAD who are currently employed say their symptoms have a negative impact on their professional relationships when left untreated.
 - About a third (31%) say their symptoms have a major negative impact.

Most adults with SAD who are currently employed have kept their condition a secret from coworkers, which is not surprising since many feel their disorder has held them back professionally. Some have a hard time going to work because of their symptoms, and others feel they are not as productive as they should be. Many adults with SAD have been absent from work because of their symptoms, and some have even quit a job because of their symptoms.

- Around 6 in 10 (63%) have kept their condition a secret from coworkers.
- 57% say their disorder has held them back professionally.
- 44% often have a hard time going to work because of their disorder.
- About 4 in 10 (39%) feel that they are not as productive at work as they

- should be.
- SAD symptoms have resulted in:
 - Being absent from work (45%)
 - Quitting a job (32%)
 - Spending an excessive amount of time on a task or project (28%)
 - Avoiding a mandatory meeting or event (26%)
 - Being fired from a job (19%)
 - Refusing an opportunity for promotion (15%)

Even though many adults with SAD experience some degree of difficulty with their professional relationships, the majority of those currently employed report the routine of their job helps them to cope with their symptoms. Half also say their career choice was influenced by how well they would be able to hide their symptoms.

- 81% say the routine of their job helps them to cope with their symptoms.
- Almost half (46%) say their career choice was influenced by how well they could hide their symptoms.

Most adults with SAD who are employed and currently being treated for their disorder report their treatment has made a positive impact on their professional relationships. Some even report a major positive impact.

- About 6 in 10 (62%) say their treatment has made a positive impact on their professional relationships.
 - About a third (33%) say their treatment has had a major positive impact on their professional relationships.

Treatment Profile

Most adults who have been diagnosed with SAD either are currently under the care of a health care professional or have been in the past.

- 41% of adults with SAD are currently under the care of a health care professional for their disorder.
- 48% of adults with SAD are not currently under the care of health care professional for their disorder but have been in the past.
- Only 11% of adults with SAD have never been under the care of a health care professional for their disorder.

The majority of adults with SAD have used or are currently using prescription medications to treat their disorder. Other treatments that are being used or have been used include talk therapy and relaxation techniques.

- About 7 in 10 (73%) treat their disorder with prescription medications.
- Adults with SAD also treat their disorder with:
 - Talk therapy (41%)
 - Relaxation techniques (37%)
 - Exercise (32%)
 - Faith/Prayer (29%)
 - Cognitive-Behavioral therapy (16%)
- 15% say they are not currently treating their SAD.

Many adults who are not currently receiving treatment for their disorder feel they can control the disorder themselves. Others have cost concerns and some have medication concerns.

Reasons adults with SAD are not currently receiving treatment:

- They feel they are able to control the disorder themselves (44%)
- It is too expensive to get treatment (32%)
- They are concerned about the potential side effects of medications (29%)
- They don't like to take medications (29%)

About the Survey

This survey was conducted online within the United States by Harris Interactive on behalf of the Anxiety Disorders Association of American between December 11th and December 17th, 2007 among 578 people with anxiety, 276 people with obsessive-compulsive disorder, and 287 people with social anxiety disorder. Results were weighted as needed for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online. Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the U.S. adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to be invited to participate in the Harris Interactive online research panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.